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THE MAKING OF BMX SIMULATOR

DAVID DARLING REVISITS THE GAME THAT KICK-STARTED CODEMASTERS

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GHOSTS'N GOBLINS Resurrection

YOSHIAKI HIRABAYASHI ON REBOOTING AN ARCADE CLASSIC

THE HISTORY OF TIMESPLITTERS

THE FREE RADICAL DESIGN TEAM RETURN TO THE CULT TIME-SKIPPING FPS SERIES

MEGA DRIVE RPGs COLLECTING GUIDE

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THE EVOLUTION OF PITFALL!

DAVID CRANE TELLS US HOW HIS ICONIC GAME TRANSFORMED

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STAR LORD **STREET FIGHTER III: 3RD STRIKE** **THE NEW ZEALAND STORY**

FUTURE
LOAD 218

THE RETROBATES

WHAT GAME DEFINED THE NINETIES FOR YOU?

DARRAN JONES

I think it has to be *Super Mario 64* as it revolutionised platformers and 3D gaming in general.

Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls, a SNES-loving cousin and an award-winning mag, all under one roof!

Currently playing: *Lonely Mountains: Downhill*

Favourite game of all time: *Strider*

TIM EMPEY

Tekken 2, because I specifically got a PlaySation just to play it, and it was one of the first games to show off 3D gaming in my lounge.

Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go off the service

Currently playing: *Final Fantasy XII: The Zodiac Age*

Favourite game of all time: *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*

NICK THORPE

I'd say *Sonic The Hedgehog* defined the Nineties for me, but really it's more like my entire life.

Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III

Currently playing: *Capcom Arcade Stadium*

Favourite game of all time: *Sonic The Hedgehog*

ANDY SALTER

Say 'Unreal' to a kid these days and they reply "the engine behind *Fortnite?*". While iD's *Quake III* had the looks, *Unreal Tournament* was the better game, offering more variety in the weapons and game modes.

Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!

Currently playing: *M&B2: Bannerlord*

Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War*

PAUL ROSE

Sonic 2, because that felt like the moment console gaming started its world domination.

Expertise: Winging it

Currently playing: *Spider-Man: Miles Morales*

Favourite game of all time: *Half-Life 2*

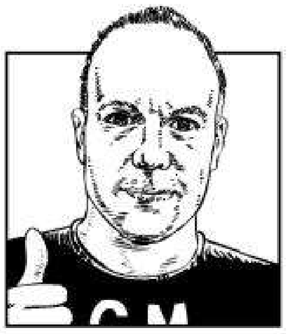
PAUL DRURY

WipEout. Banging tunes, stylish visuals and yes, I did play it in a club in Nottingham in the Nineties, which felt weird and kind of like living in the future. Which it turned out we were.

Expertise: Darran's retro shed

Currently playing: Pico-8 stuff

Favourite game of all time: *Strider* (this month only)



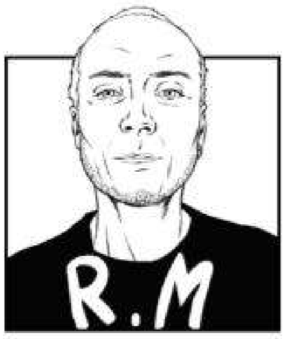
GRAEME MASON

Definitely *Resident Evil* - it changed gaming forever for me and defined how games were becoming more immersive and complex.

Expertise: Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver

Currently playing: *Dead Space 2* (*Resident Evil* in space)

Favourite game of all time: *Resident Evil 4*



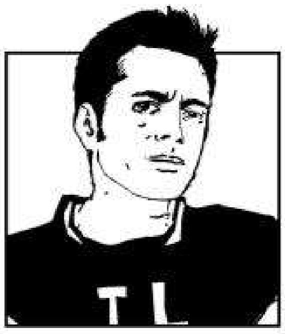
RORY MILNE

I'd say Nineties gaming peaked mid-decade thanks to the release of consoles that were almost as powerful as coin-ops. For me, *WipEout* defined that era, and it made games cool.

Expertise: The game I'm writing about at the time of writing

Currently playing: *Impossible Mission II*

Favourite game of all time: *Tempest*



IAIN LEE

It was all about *WipEout* for me. I'd dropped out of gaming and saw it on a Saturn. My mind was blown.

Expertise: Buying overpriced stuff on eBay then never touching it

Currently playing: *Hitman 3*

Favourite game of all time: *Elite* (BBC Model B)

LOADING...

Well this is rather lovely. It's now been 200 issues since **Retro Gamer** was resurrected after the closure of Live Publishing and I've been fortunate enough to oversee every one of them. I've worked on **Retro Gamer** for over 15 years and during that time we've covered a vast amount of classic games and spoken to countless developers, many of who defined my childhood, as I'm sure they did yours.

While I'm too old to be a child of the Nineties, I certainly have fond memories of the decade, as it was arguably one of the most transformative that the games industry went through. Just think about it. You had the Spectrum, C64 and other 8-bit systems at the decade's start, while the mid-Nineties introduced the 3D era and Sega even managed to sneak in the Dreamcast – that's four generations in a single decade!

Equally impressive (if you don't mind me saying so) is our exhaustive cover feature that looks at all the big changes that happened to the industry during this important period. We've got great insight from the people who were there and it's a great companion article to our Eighties feature from issue 208. There's further Nineties brilliance in the form of *Clock Tower*, *Buck Rogers: Countdown To Doomsday* and the epic AM2 crossover *Fighters Megamix*. Oh, and we've also grabbed David Darling to chat about *BMX Simulator* in case you were getting nostalgic for the Eighties.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine,

Darran

retro GAMER
Back To The 90s

GAMEGEARPRESTIGE

Developed under the name "Project Mercury", the Game Gear was the primary competition to the Game Boy, the Atari Lynx and the TurboExpress.

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Paul has been musing away and was wondering if playing videogames has been helpful in battling COVID-19 this past year

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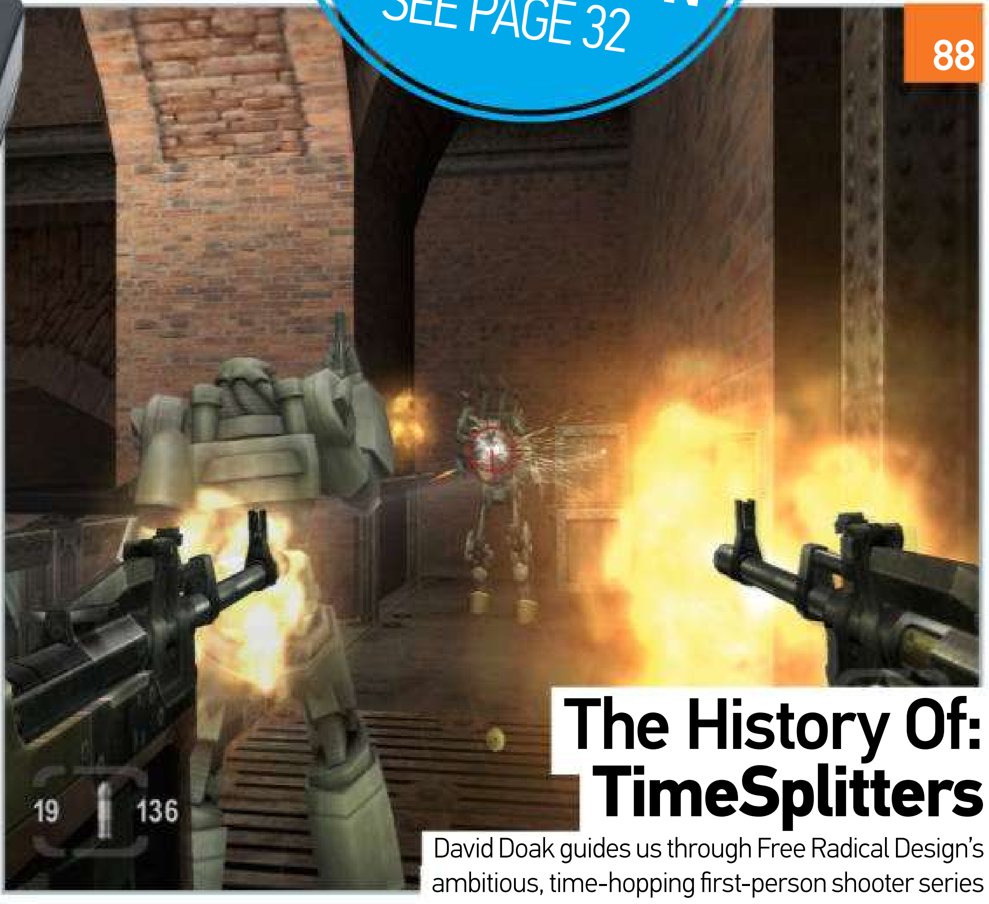

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David Doak guides us through Free Radical Design's ambitious, time-hopping first-person shooter series

Super Mario 64
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★120
KIMKAPHWAN
TIME 36
2 HITS
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used GROWL!
100% FOR SUPER NINTENDO PLAYERS
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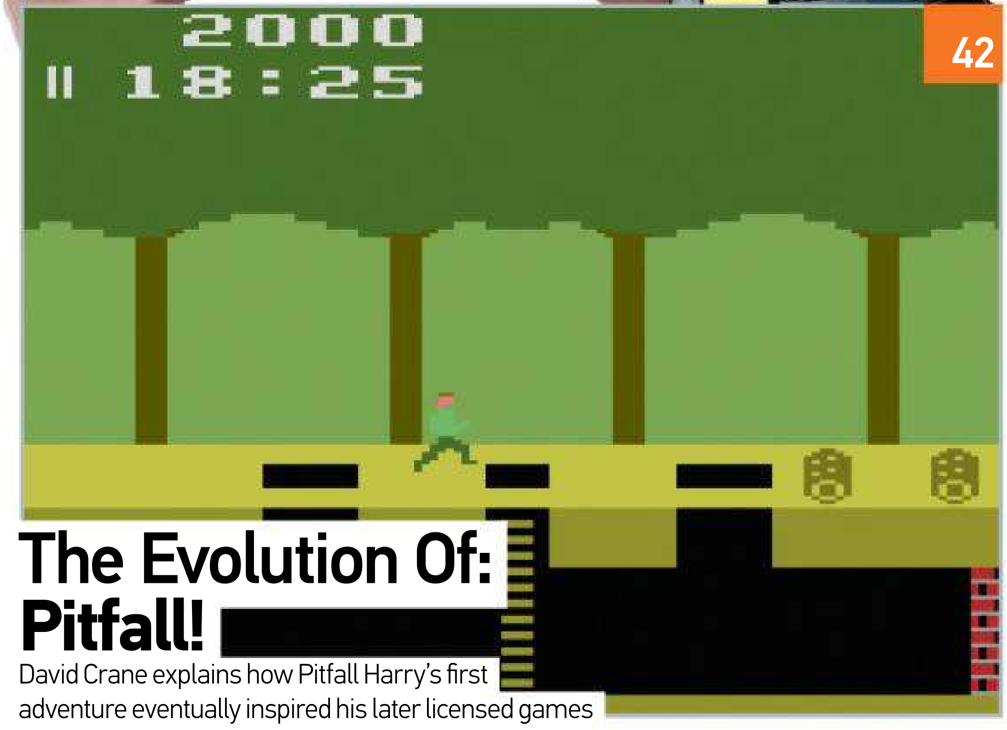
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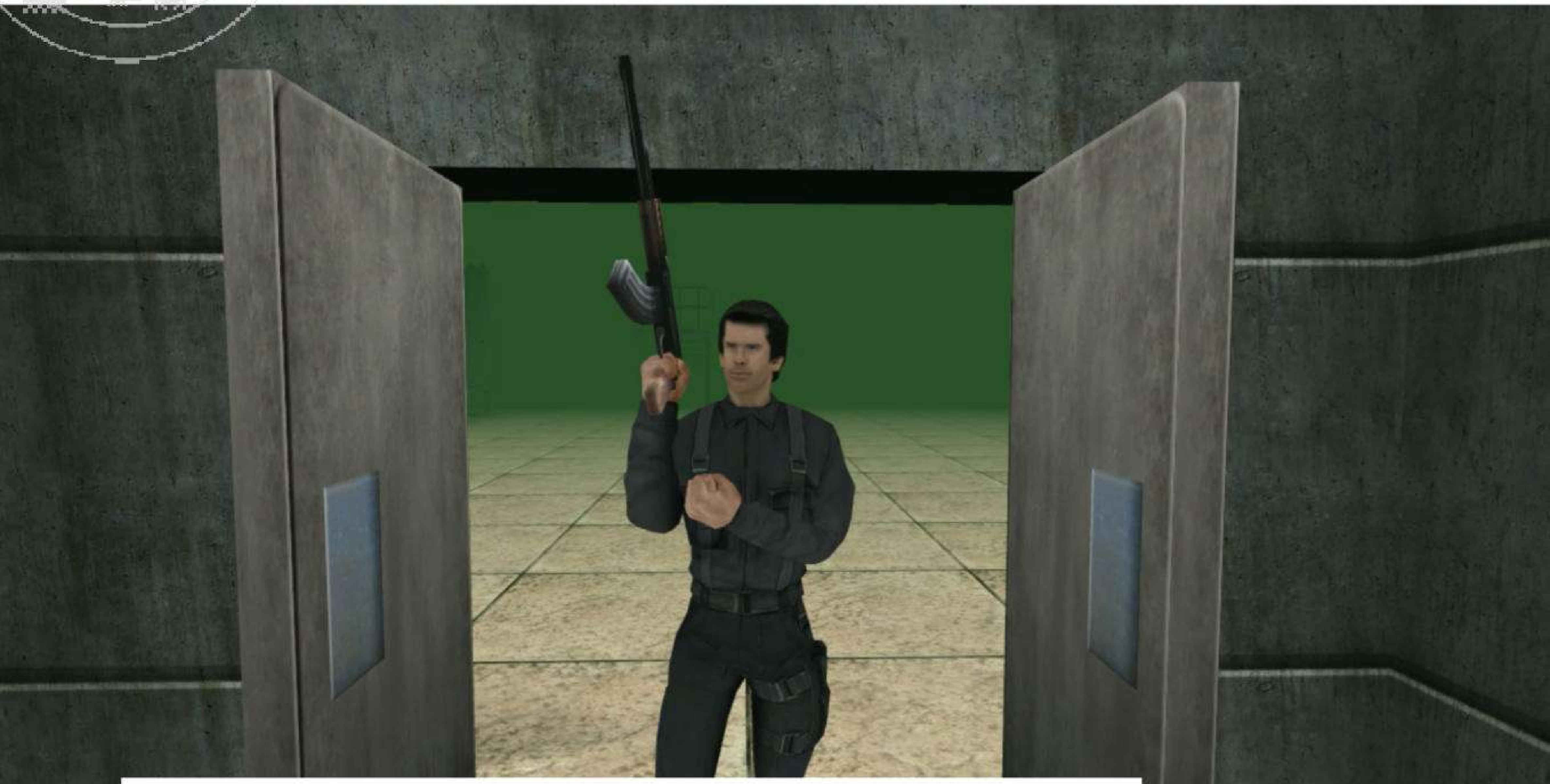

» [Xbox 360] The *GoldenEye* remaster is a huge improvement over the original game.

TWO RARE DISCOVERIES

Rare's GoldeneEye remaster and Dinosaur Planet appear online

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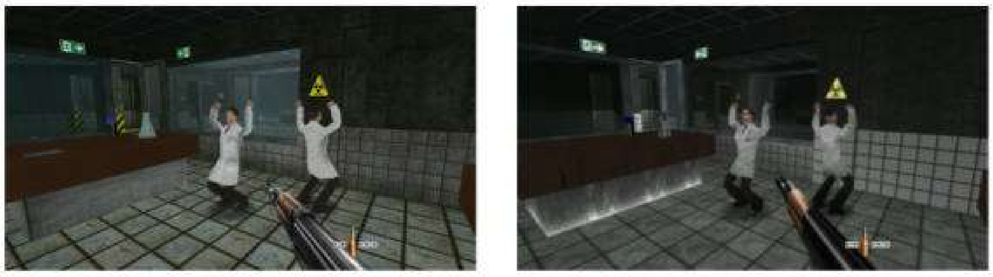
It's another month and this time, Nick finds himself in May 2004

Rare has been making games for nearly 40 years and during that time a number of fabled projects never came to be. In the early days, when the Twycross-based company was known as Ultimate Play The Game, *Mire Mare*, Sabreman's next planned adventure for 8-bit systems, was mentioned in various Sabreman games but never released. Other Rare projects that never saw the light of day included *Sabreman Stampede*, a remake of the cancelled *Donkey Kong Racing*, and a sequel to *Conker's Bad Fur Day*. Perhaps the only game to match the mythical status of *Mire Mare* was Rare's Xbox 360 remaster of *GoldenEye 007*, which was originally revealed in a 2008 issue of *Xbox World 360* and was apparently two months from completion when the game was stalled.

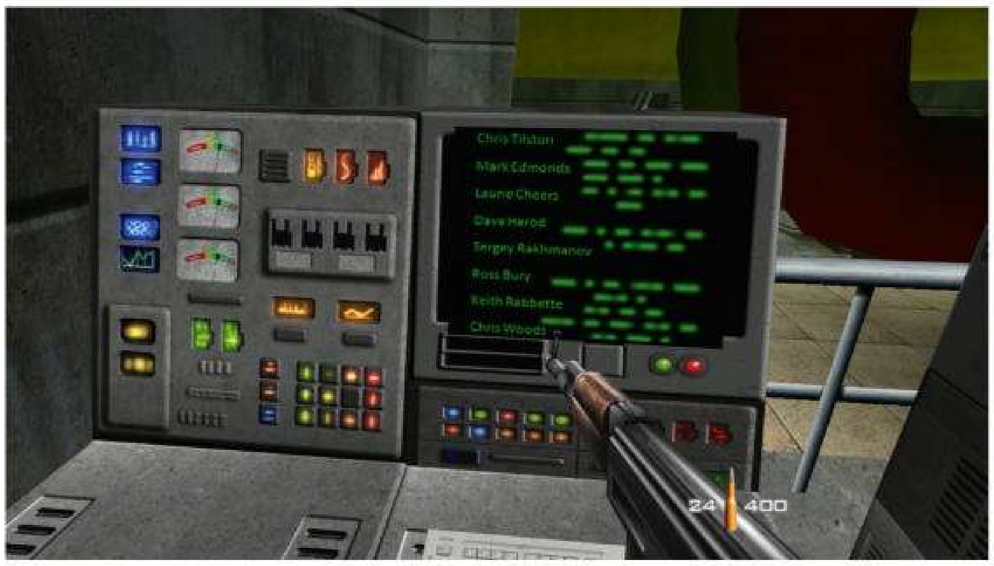
We no longer have to wonder how good Rare's remaster would have been because it's now been leaked online and YouTubers and websites alike have wasted no time in showing off just how great the lost game is. As brilliant as the original game is, it was always hampered by its control system, which was as good as you could expect for a pad with only one analogue stick, but was far from perfect. That's no longer an issue as the Xbox 360 pad is superb for first-person shooters and *GoldenEye* controls similarly to the excellent Xbox 360 port of *Perfect Dark*, which was originally released in 2010 and is available on the fantastic *Rare Replay* compilation for Xbox One.

A rather significant change to the game over the N64 original is all the graphical enhancements that have been made. It's massively improved with wonderfully detailed backgrounds, high-definition visuals and characters which are absolutely brimming with detail. Another drastic improvement is that the game now runs at 60 frames per second, meaning it looks and plays far better than it did on the original N64. If you're feeling nostalgic for Nintendo's 64-bit console, don't worry, as a simple button press will revert to the original graphics (the original C code of the N64 game was converted to C++ and then modified to make it feel as authentic as possible). It's an exceptionally neat trick that's featured in a variety of Xbox 360 games from *R-Type Dimensions* to *Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary*, but it still manages to look cool and would have been one of the first examples if it had been released.

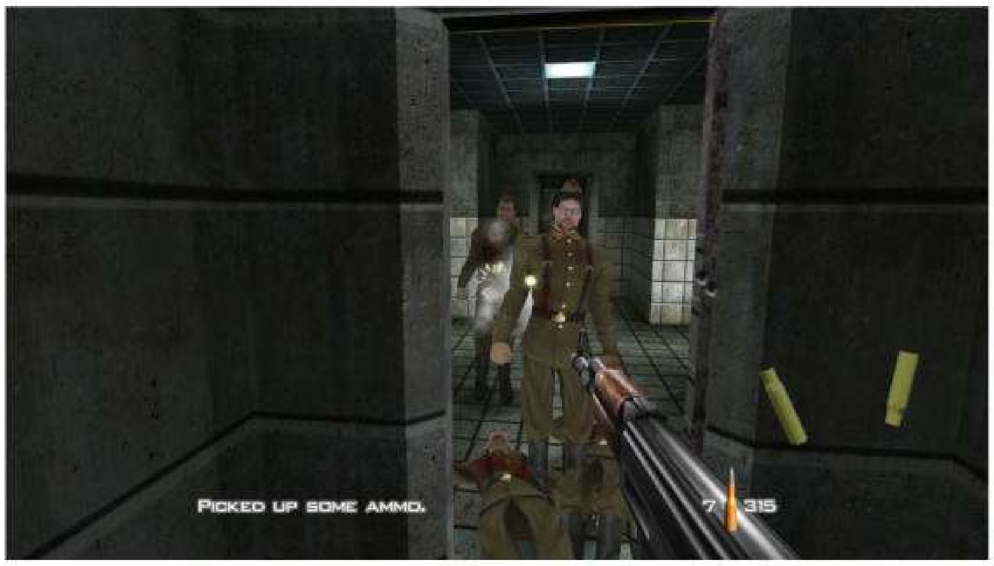
While it's unclear who leaked the code online a couple of Rare developers have now come forward and spoken about the game, mainly clearing up why it was never released in the first place. Back in 2015, Phil

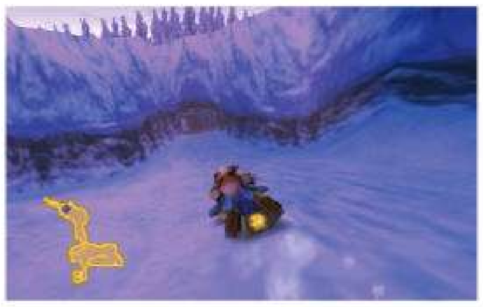


» [Xbox 360] If you need further proof of the work that went into Rare's remaster, here's a screen next to the N64 mode.

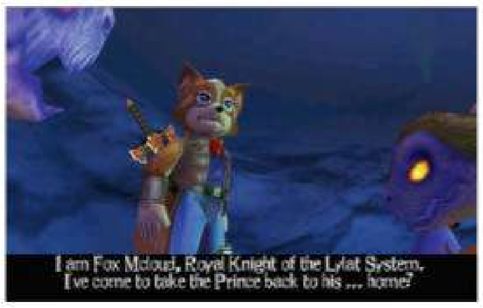


» [Xbox 360] In a nice touch you can see the names of the dev team on various computer monitors.





» [N64] *Dinosaur Planet* is clearly pushing the N64. It often looks incredibly impressive.



I am Fox McCloud, Royal Knight of the Lylat System.
I've come to take the Prince back to his ... home?

» [N64] While this build features Fox McCloud, other parts of the game still refer to him as Sabre.

Spencer spoke about the game's cancellation on Twitter revealing, "*GoldenEye* rights are so challenging, looked at this many times. Lots of different parties to work with, we've always given up." In a recent interview with *Ars Technica*, Mark Edmonds, who worked as a programmer on the game revealed the following information. "When it was put to Nintendo, everyone there approved it, except they didn't check with the one guy that mattered." While it's unclear who that person was, Mark recalls, "I believe I was told his response went along the lines of 'There is no way a Nintendo game is coming out on a Microsoft console.'"

We may never know what the full story is about *GoldenEye*'s cancellation, but what we do know is that even in its unfinished state it's an incredible game that does the original proud and improves on it in every possible way. It's just a pity that Microsoft and Nintendo couldn't reach a suitable agreement as Rare's remaster really is magnificent.

That's not the end of our Rare story however. As we were going to press, the Twitter account Forest Of Illusion revealed it had secured a version of the cancelled N64 project, *Dinosaur Planet*, which it made available at its website illusion.64history.net. Where *GoldenEye* was leaked online, *Dinosaur Planet* (which later became *Star Fox Adventures*), was on a CD-R that was purchased from a Swedish collector. We've only had the briefest of looks (expect a Whatever Happened To? feature next issue) but it looks fantastic, which isn't too surprising as Rare did little wrong during its N64 period. The build is dated 2000 and while it takes a little effort, it does run on both an emulator and an N64 (although we noticed that the emulated version was glitchy at times).

While we've only played *Dinosaur Planet* for just over an hour, it's already showing a lot of promise. Being late in development it features Fox McCloud instead of the original hero, Sabre, although here he uses a sword, rather than the staff he wields in the GameCube game. While *Dinosaur Planet* starts the same as *Star Fox Adventures* with Krystal exploring a large airship, it soon changes and introduces Rubble, a creature made of rocks who lets you switch over to Fox (you can switch characters whenever you find Rubble or his brother, Rocky). You then start to explore an icy area and eventually meet up with Prince Tricky, who also featured in the GameCube game. Needless to say, expect more information in our next issue.

Rare has always been known for its secretive nature (particularly during its Ultimate days), so this glimpse behind the curtain has been a fascinating one. Who knows what will be discovered in the future? Maybe we'll find out there was forgotten *Mire Mare* code after all… ✱

SKYWARD SWORD RETURNS

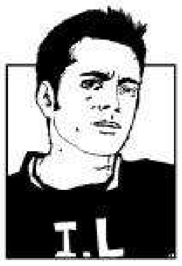
Nintendo recently used its latest Nintendo Direct to reveal that a brand-new remaster of *The Legend Of Zelda: Skyward Sword* is in the works and will be available this July. We're particularly pleased about this, as *Zelda*'s exclusive Wii adventure is a great game with excellent motion controls and an entertaining story. Nintendo is porting the original controls to the Switch, but is also making adjustments to ensure it can be played without as well. Expect a review soon.

NINJAS AND MANA

Skyward Sword wasn't the only returning game series recently announced. A compilation containing all three modern *Ninja Gaiden* games is heading to Switch, but the bigger news (for us at least) was a HD update of *Legend Of Mana*. Square's action RPG was originally released in the US and Japan, so European gamers couldn't play it without importing. *Legend Of Mana* is also heading to PS4 and PC, so only Xbox gamers are missing out.

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance broadcaster who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. Join him as he hosts a phone-in show and plays games at www.twitch.tv/iainlee and also check out www.patreon.com/iainlee.

20 GOTO 10



I give up. Ever since I started writing for **Retro Gamer** I've had an idea of doing a column that was written in BASIC, like a type-in programme from an old computer mag. The thing is, I can't remember BASIC. Sure, I can do the classic:

```
10 PRINT “IAIN IS SKILLZ;
20 GOTO 10
```

But so what? Although I do have to point out the addition of the semi colon, simple but effective. However, I cannot remember anything else. This may seem unsurprising to you, but I used to be wicked at BASIC. When I was ten or so, it was very common to be dumped off in the computer department of Boots or Smiths (although the staff at Smiths had less patience then the pharmacist) while mum went shopping for two or three hours. This wasn't neglect this was simply the Eighties and there would be dozens of kids milling around the machines, like some low rent arcade. If the staff had reset the computers, which they did quite often to clear the room of feral orphans, what to do? I did not want to relinquish my time on the BBC, C64 or, at a push the Amstrad or even MSX that were available. So I would programme them. And I very quickly went well beyond the example given above.

No, I was famed for writing a pretty complex quiz. It would ask you your name and then proceed to fire questions at you, eventually telling you what your score was and asking if you'd like another go. Fifteen questions would take about twenty minutes to type in. I'd then stand back and lurk as people came up and had a go. In all honesty I felt stupidly proud, and when my mum came back from the shops, I'd tell her and show her what I had done. She wasn't bothered and would hurry me home.

I didn't just do quizzes. I seem to remember writing a programme that converted Fahrenheit to centigrade. Not just one figure, oh no, it would do a range. God knows how I knew the formula. I was a weird kid.

And that's why I thought writing a simple little type in for **RG** would be so easy. I know there are commands like IF…THEN and A$ is key in logging the player's name, but what else is there? Haven't got a bloomin' clue. I remember more German than I do BASIC, and I failed German GCSE twice. It doesn't matter anymore I guess. BASIC is as dead as Esperanto and won't actually achieve anything for me. My kids are now learning to program in a much simpler way than I did and at the age of nine my youngest can achieve more on a computer than I ever could. But there's a part of me that would still like to be able to do it. I suspect I'll add it onto that ever growing list of mid-life crises things I'd like to do before I die but never will. *

TX
WITH R/G/B
VOLUME
BRIGHTNESS
CONTRAST
COLOUR
1
2
3
4
5
6
7+RGB
8+VIDEO
FERGUSON TX

```
BBC Computer 32K

Acorn DFS

BASIC

>10 PRINT "IAIN IS SKILLZ"
>20 GOTO 10
>RUN_
```

> “I did not want to relinquish my time on the BBC, C64 or, at a push the Amstrad or even MSX that were available”

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:
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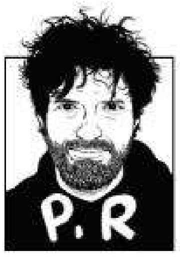
FEATURING DIGITISER'S MR BIFFO

Who is Paul Rose?

Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser.* These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

A force for good



Did… did videogames sort of save the world over the past year? Alright, I know… videogames didn't get rid of COVID-19. Vaccines, social distancing, blah blah. But did videogames, at the very least, demonstrate to the wider world – finally – that they can be a force for good? That they could actually be beneficial to our mental and emotional wellbeing?

Ever since I first started playing videogames, they were viewed as a sort of cult thing. A bit scary and strange, and dangerous. I grew up in the age of 'videogame nasty' headlines, warnings about games triggering seizures and excessive violence that was going to corrupt youthful minds.

> "Even in the days before we could get online, I'd go and see friends to watch them play some new game they had"

Rarely were the positives heralded. Even if Nintendo and Atari would promote their products with advertisements featuring families gathered around the console – like wartime mums, dads and their kids listening to a wireless waiting for Mr Chamberlain to address the nation – rarely did that scene of domesticity, united by games, make it into the wider media.

So many of us have turned to games as an escape during the long, endless months where we couldn't meet up with people in real life. Gaming really, truly, feels like it has come of age as a social pursuit. Of course, those of us who know this have always known it. Games were always something to be shared with family or friends.

Even in the days before we could get online, I'd go and see friends to watch them play some new game they had (I guess, that's kind of the forebear of Twitch streaming). When they were little, my kids would ask to sit on my lap to watch me play. Heck, my entire family gathering to play *Wii Sports* remains a cherished memory.

How many of these sort of coming together moments have played out online in the past year? I know that my kids – the eldest ones now scattered to the winds – have been playing *Animal Crossing* together, online. Videogames have kept them united, even while they've been forced apart by the pandemic.

None of this was ever heard over the tedious drone of certain areas of the media shrieking that videogames were bad for you. Retro gaming would never have become as big a hobby as it is if we associated it with bad memories, or difficult times. When I do associate certain games with difficult periods in my life, the game is the ray of sunshine, the escape, the balm on my troubles. You don't surround yourself with the reminders of pain or sorrow. You surround yourself with things that make you realise nothing bad lasts forever.

Alright, so I was overstating it when I said that videogames saved the world, but videogames have made life a damn sight more bearable for many of us, and maybe saved some of us from more pain and sorrow. That long winter we've just been through would've been all the tougher without them.

Maybe, finally, the videogame nasty tag has gone away for good… yeah, right! ✱

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

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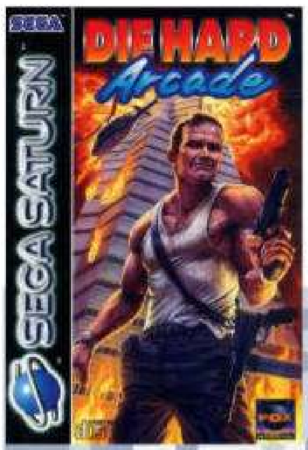
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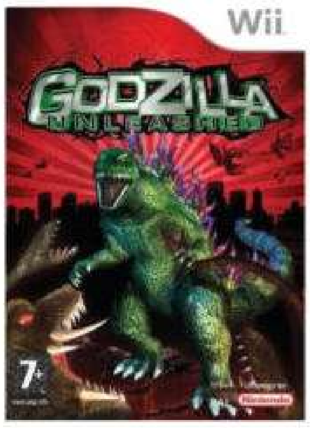
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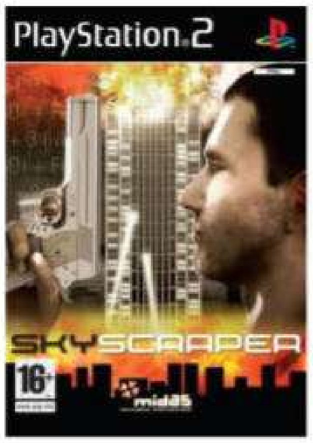
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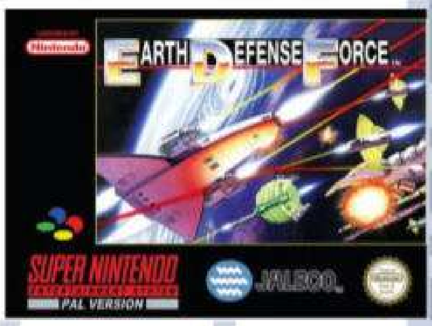
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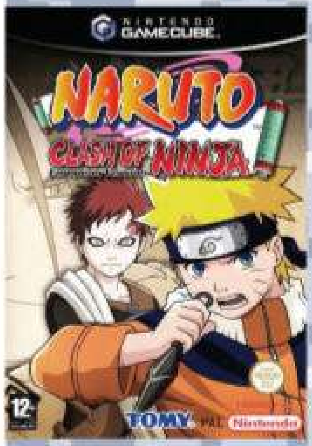
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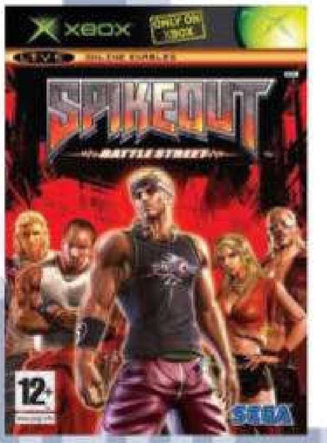
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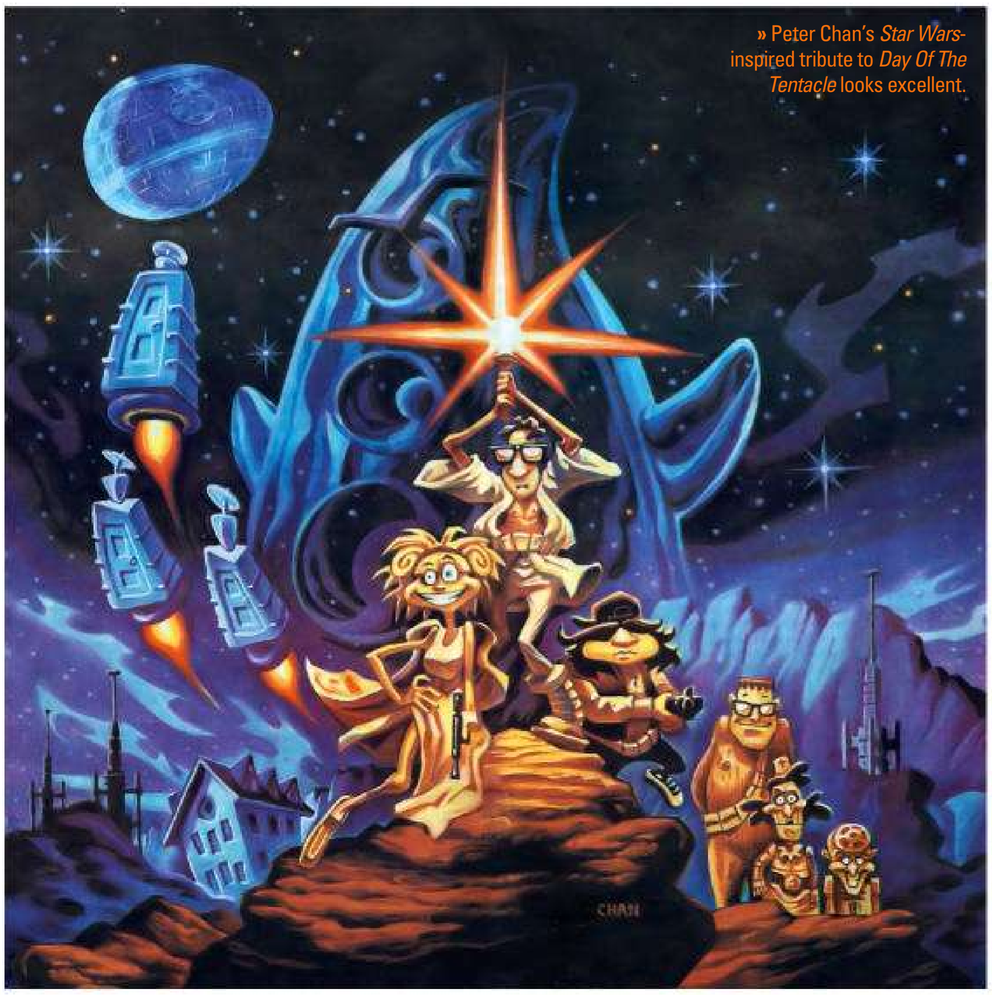
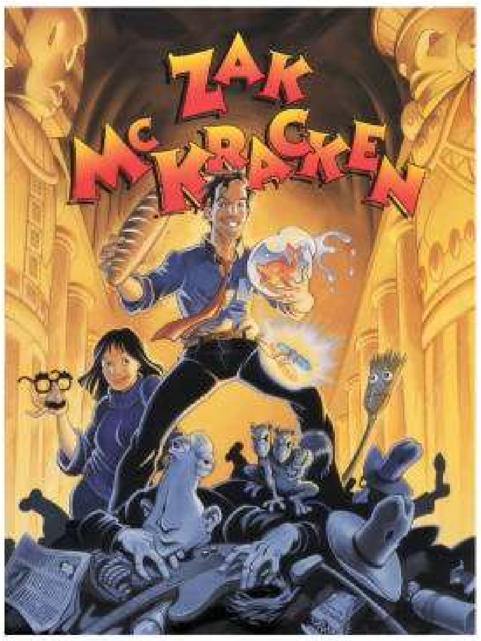
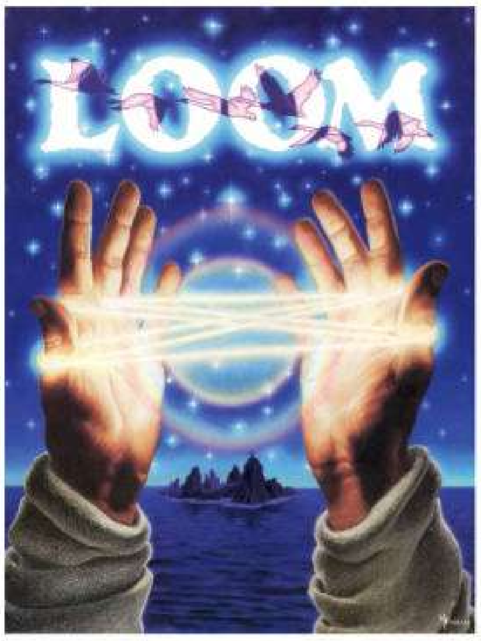
Restoring the past

Jan Hofmeister walks us through his LucasArts restoration project


» Peter Chan's *Star Wars*-inspired tribute to *Day Of The Tentacle* looks excellent.

» Restoring Steve Purcell's *Zak McKraken* art was tough as Jan had so few resources to use.




» Here's Mark Ferrari's *Loom* artwork. Jan has now been restoring the art of LucasArts for over ten years.

A lot of readers loved our *Monkey Island* cover from issue 212, so it made perfect sense to talk to the person behind it. While Steve Purcell painted the original art for LucasArts back in the day, graphic artist Jan Hofmeister is responsible for the incredible restoration work that adorns our cover (check out his other restoration projects at poster.mixnmojo.com) Here he tells us the painstaking process behind restoring classic pieces of art to their original glory.

How did you become interested in LucasArts adventures?

One of my earliest gaming memories is seeing *Maniac Mansion* on my uncle's C64. Years later one of the first games I saw running on a PC was the EGA version of *The Secret Of Monkey Island*, and it totally blew my mind. During my teenage years more and more LucasArts games – both adventure games and titles like *X-Wing* and *TIE Fighter* – circulated among our group of friends, so we played many of them together. Those games and their special brand of humour were a big part of my childhood and adolescence.

Why did you start restoring the company's artwork?

It began rather simple, when sometime around 2008 there was a thread at the Mix'n'Mojo-section of the LucasForums where people shared scans of those wonderful game boxes. With a few bare walls to fill in my apartment, I decided to use my Photoshop skills to clean up the artworks for the first two *Monkey Island* games, and upscale them for poster printing. This got the ball rolling and more people got interested in these kinds of posters. Back then both the LucasForums and the ScummVM forums were *the* place for hardcore LucasArts fans to hang out at, which in turn hooked me up with many fans and collectors that were able to provide me with scans of their game boxes, manuals and posters. Over the years the process of restoring these artworks felt like it had some value to it, as this stuff was worth – and in need of – being preserved.

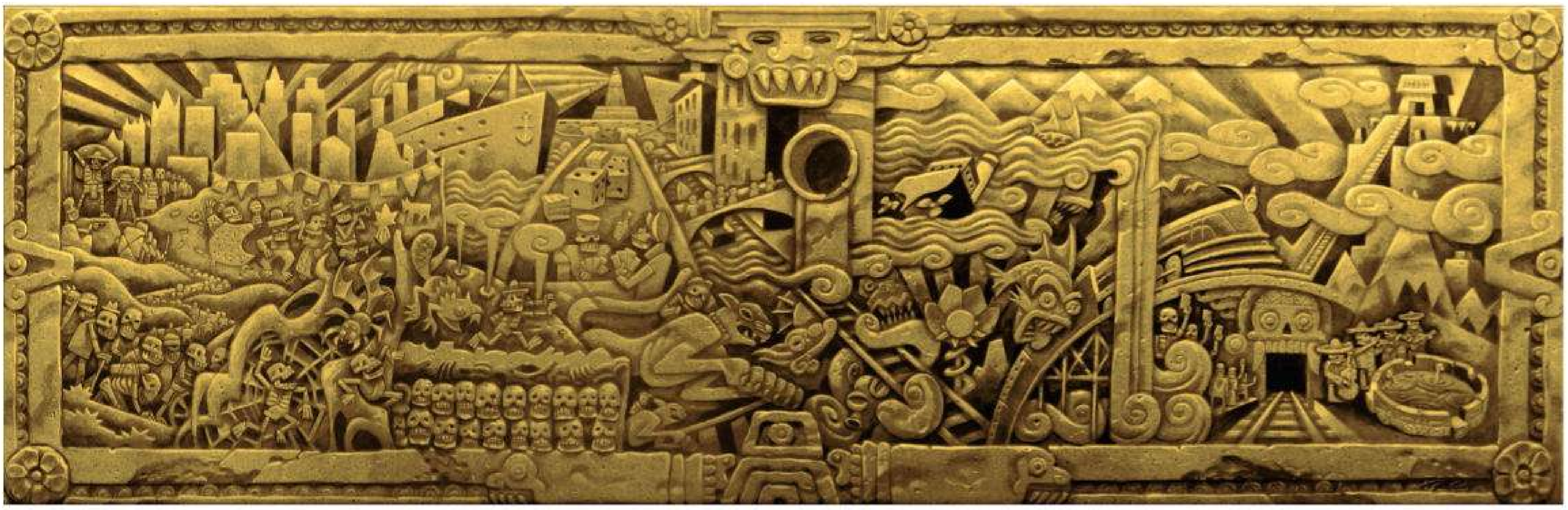
Are you surprised publishers rarely keep old artwork?

I think it's a sad thing to happen, but it doesn't necessarily surprise me. The reality is that back in the Eighties and Nineties digital archiving wasn't the norm and physical art could easily get damaged, lost or simply forgotten.

What do you use as a source and are you able to access the original prints?

My main source are scans of the game boxes, manuals and stuff like

» This *Grim Fandango* mural is astonishing and full of detail. We can only imagine how long it took Jan to restore.



hint books or merchandise. Some of these I purchase myself on eBay, but most of the material comes from collectors who agree to help me out (and have the means to make proper scans). For a few posters the original artists were kind enough to share some of their art, most notably Bill Tiller who provided his original Photoshop file of his *Curse Of Monkey Island* box artwork. I have been able to scan a few commercially available art prints, but haven't had a chance to get my hands on any original proofs or paintings to scan.

How do you go about restoring each piece of art?

While the approach might differ in some cases, most of the time it starts with collecting as many different scans of the artwork as possible. Usually, the boxes are covered in logos, text and stickers, and my first goal is to remove all of that stuff to end up with only the artwork. It helps that different releases of the same game often have text and logos in different places, so it's basically a puzzle to figure out which part of which scan could be used for what. All those pieces get lined up and colour corrected to match each other, so that in the end it doesn't look like patchwork anymore.

Sounds complicated! Do you do anything else?

I remove any remaining scratches, dirt and other imperfections, while keeping as much detail from the original painting as possible. It helps that image-editing software has improved massively over the years, because 20 years ago restorations like these would not have been possible at this level. The last step is upscaling the art from the size of a game box to something that can be hung on a wall, which is also an area that saw big improvements through the advent of artificial intelligence and machine-learning algorithms.

Do restorations take much time?

The time a restoration takes varies wildly between artworks, based on what material is available, what condition it's in and what needs to be done to it. Anything between four and forty hours can be poured into these, and sometimes I revisit an artwork years later, if I stumble across new material that would yield a better result.

What problems do you face?

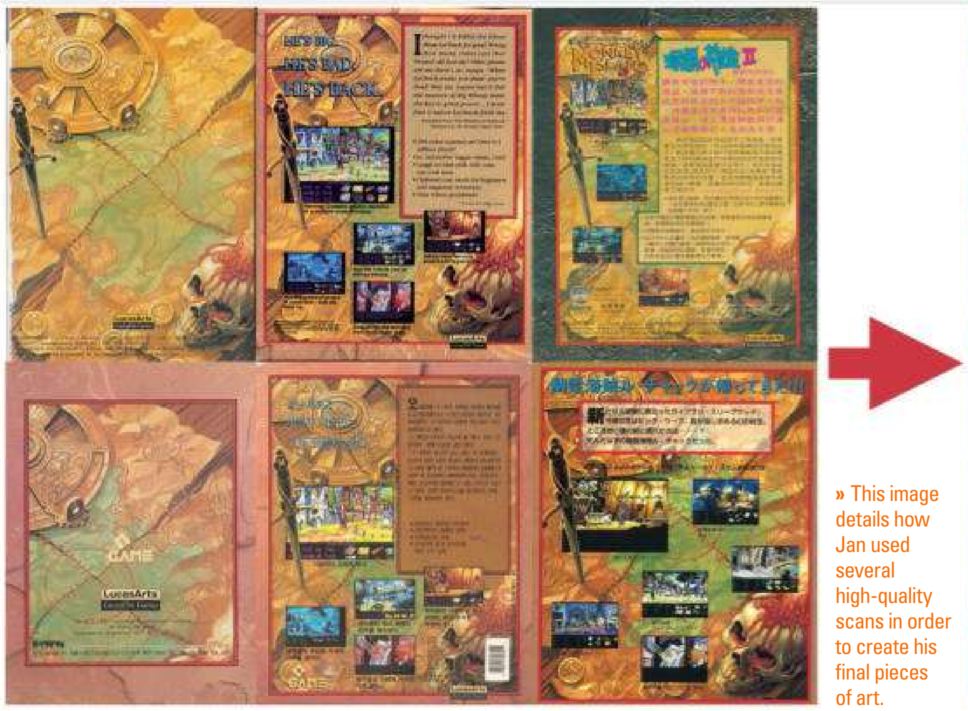
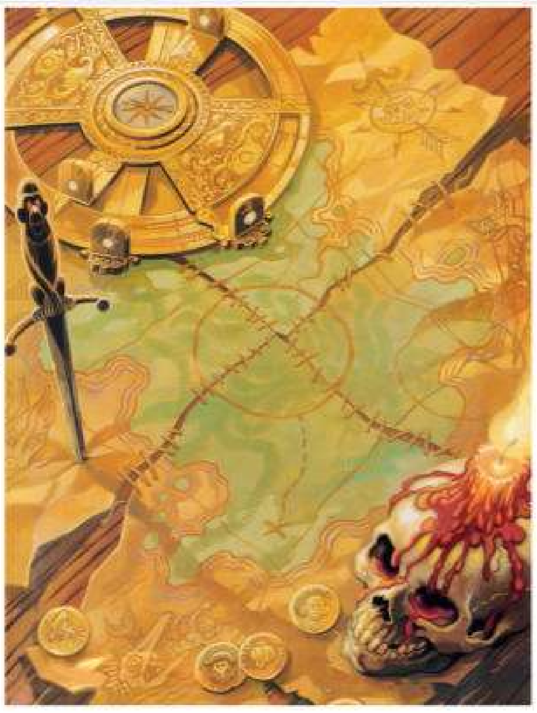
The most problematic artworks are usually the ones where there isn't much actual material available. To remove logos and various other overlays I'm always relying on having just enough sources to reveal what's hiding behind those elements. For example, Steve Purcell's painting for *Zak McKracken And The Alien Mindbenders* was one of the first pieces I've restored for my project, and I still haven't found a proper version of the art that shows what's behind its logo.

Which restorations are you most proud of and do you have a personal favourite?

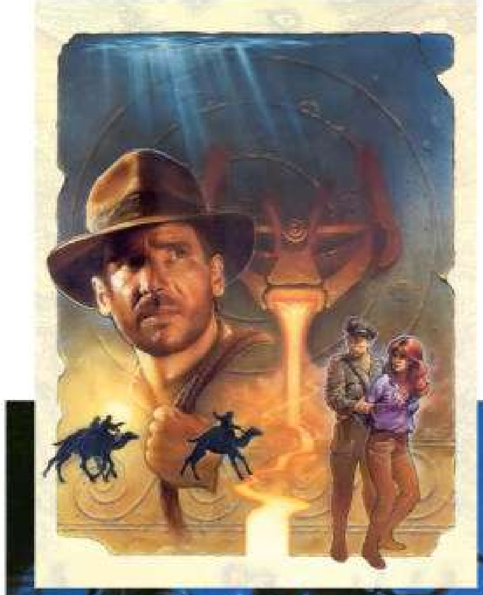
There are a few that stand out for me. The first two *Monkey Island* artworks are probably the most important ones, because they initiated the whole project. To this day I have them hanging above my desk, even after several moves. Another one is Steve Purcell's back-of-the-box painting from *Monkey Island 2*, which I've recently added to the project. This one was especially satisfying because until last year I didn't even know there were proper sources available to reconstruct the whole artwork from. A few years ago Steve sold the original painting on eBay, so I assumed it was basically gone for good. It turned out that both the Korean and Taiwanese releases of the game featured the painting prominently on their manuals, so when I found a collector who owned both of those versions and was able to scan them for me, it felt like winning the lottery.

Why do you think people respond so strongly to LucasArts artwork?

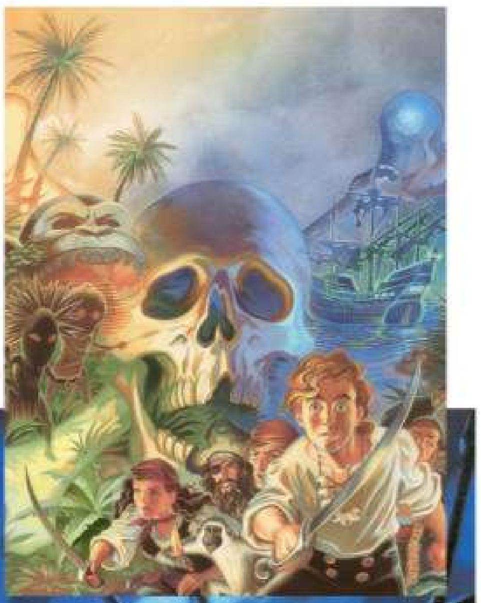
Apart from the fact that these images are simply great art, I think nostalgia plays a big part in it as well, as they bring back the memories of playing these games as a kid back in the day. Not to mention that these were and still are damn good games, so I guess people are proud to have been part of that. ✱

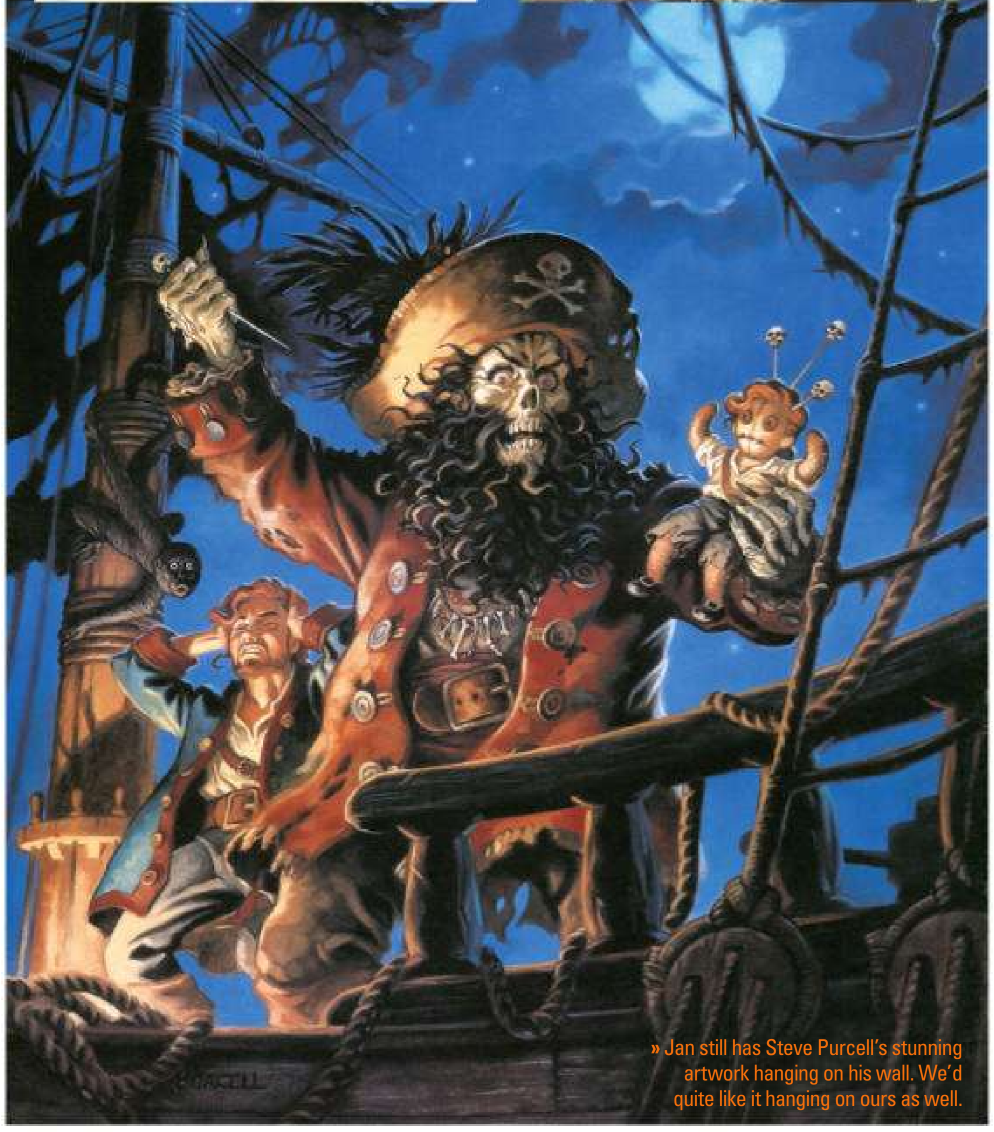
» This image details how Jan used several high-quality scans in order to create his final pieces of art.



» Jan has restored a lot of *Indiana Jones* art, including this excellent piece by Bill Eaken.



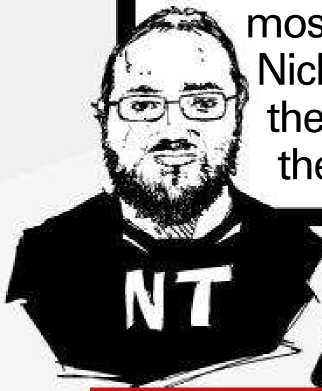
» If you bought issue 212 you'll instantly recognise Jan's excellent restoration work of Steve Purcell's iconic art.



» Jan still has Steve Purcell's stunning artwork hanging on his wall. We'd quite like it hanging on ours as well.

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

MAY 2004 – With some exciting new hardware to look at, a big retro return that lives up to all the hype and even a new Dreamcast game, May acquits itself far better than most months in 2004. Nick Thorpe turns back the clock to see what all the fuss was about



NEWS MAY 2004

The popular sitcom *Friends* aired its final episode on 6 May, bringing a ten-year, 234-episode run to a close with a two-part special that saw Ross and Rachel finally decide to be together. 52.5 million American viewers tuned in, making it the fourth most-watched TV finale ever behind *MASH*, *Cheers* and *Seinfeld*. The show also drew a record sitcom audience of 5.16 million viewers in Canada the same day. In the UK, Channel 4 aired the finale on 28 May and drew 8.6 million viewers, beating the series' previous record of 6.5 million viewers from June 2002.

Arsenal beat Leicester City 2-1 on 15 May to complete the Premier League's first ever unbeaten season, earning 'The Invincibles' as a nickname. The club, which had already secured its place as the league champion with an away draw at Tottenham on 25 April, was the first team to achieve a top flight season without any losses since Preston North End in 1888-89 – though that season was only 22 games, compared to Arsenal's 38. The feat has yet to be repeated, with Chelsea in 2004-05 and Liverpool in 2018-19 coming closest, losing one game each.

On 19 May, members of the protest group Fathers 4 Justice managed to hit prime minister Tony Blair with projectiles containing purple flour while he was speaking in the House of Commons. The assailants had gained entry to the front rows of the public gallery, in front of a £600,000 security screen recently installed to prevent such attacks.

NOKIA
N-GAGE

Back and better than before, could the N-Gage QD right the wrongs of Nokia's gaming business?

THE LATEST NEWS FROM MAY 2004

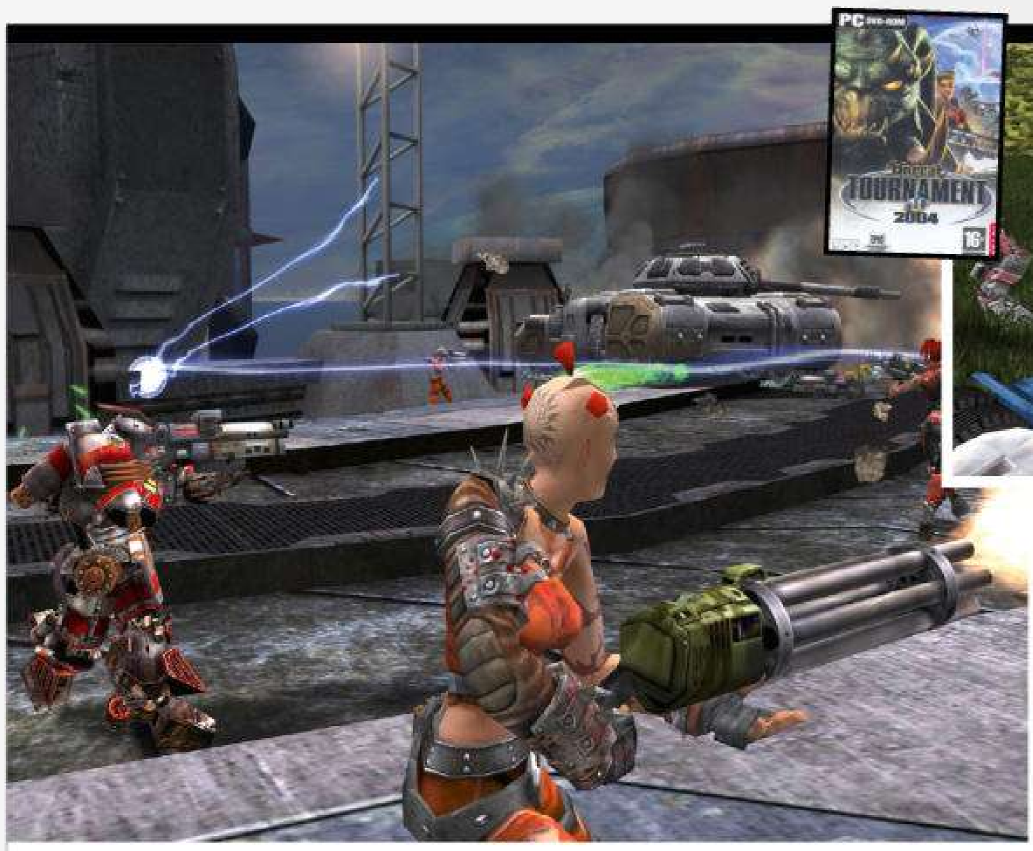
Many were willing to dismiss Nokia's ambitions to join the gaming market following the 2003 launch of the N-Gage, based on the rather awkward hardware. Undeterred, Nokia bounced back with the N-Gage QD, a revised version of the system that retained the mobile phone and handheld gaming capabilities of its predecessor. *Edge* showcased the new system, noting that "Sidetalking, the word the internet attached to the N-Gage's most ridiculous aspect, is gone" and that "the smaller footprint makes the screen seem bigger". The new system also relocated the game card slot so that it could be accessed without having to remove the battery. *Edge* did not conclude that this was the start of a grand revival, however, stating "the future of the N-Gage will depend not just on its (much-needed, and mostly successful) hardware revamp, but on the quality of support from big-name developers". With the Nintendo DS and Sony's PSP on the way, that support could well fail to arrive. Elsewhere, the much anticipated Game Developers Conference tech demos from Microsoft turned out to be a way of showing off its XNA development framework, disappointing anyone hoping for a glimpse of the next Xbox, still codenamed Xenon.

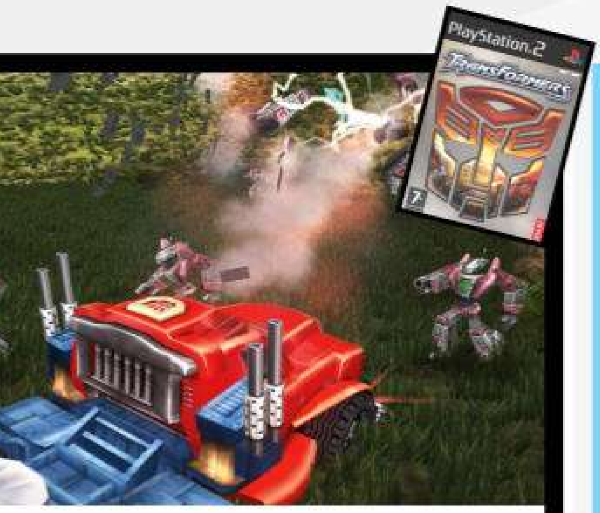
[GameCube] Pikachu and his chums have great battles, but *Pokémon Colosseum* is just a bit linear.

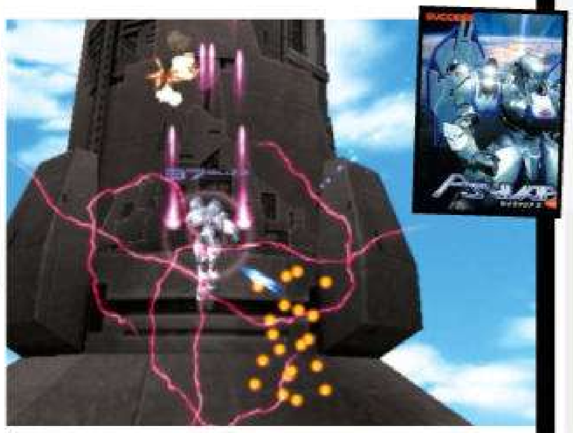
[Xbox] Team Ninja could seemingly do no wrong at this point, effortlessly reinvigorating the hack-and-slash format.

Xbox fans were treated to a stellar exclusive this month, in the form of *Ninja Gaiden*. Tecmo's revival of the classic series as a 3D action-adventure earned major praise from *Official Xbox Magazine*, which felt it to be "nigh on flawless" despite being "a case of fighting from point A to point B in the most overtly stylish manner possible". Scoring the game 9.2/10, the magazine claimed that you "must fight tooth and claw for every inch of ground" and that the game "has been created with every kind of colour and imagination possible". *GamesMaster* was also impressed, awarding the game 88% for being "a rude amount of fun". Wealthy gamers with an Xbox Live subscription and a certain specialist controller might also have enjoyed the online exclusive *Steel Battalion: Line Of Contact*. Capcom's game earned 9.0/10 in *Official Xbox Magazine*, which described it as "undeniably the greatest robot-fighting game of all time, albeit one you'll have to pay a premium for".

Over on the GameCube, those crazy critters made their return in *Pokémon Colosseum*, a successor to *Pokémon Stadium* that was also the first home console *Pokémon* game to incorporate


[PC] The pitched battles *Unreal* was known for were enhanced with the addition of tanks and other vehicles.


[PS2] Sometimes, all you want is a big truck that turns into a robot, and *Transformers* had you well covered for that.


[Dreamcast] The Sega faithful would surely get a top buzz out of the latest shoot-'em-up conversion to emerge from Japan.

an RPG mode – one that *NGC* felt to be "too damn linear" as the game required you to "watch the pre-scripted events unfold while battling trainer after trainer after trainer in order to snag as many Shadow Pokémon as you can". The game still scored 84%, with the review qualifying that "we certainly wouldn't want to suggest that it's especially bad, but after waiting so long for a 3D adventure, perhaps it hasn't quite lived up to our lofty expectations". By contrast, *GamesMaster* felt that the RPG was "deep, enjoyable and rewarding" and awarded the game a 90% score. On import, GameCube to GBA connectivity showcase The *Legend Of Zelda: Four Swords+* impressed both *Edge* and *NGC*, scoring 9/10 and 92% respectively.

PS2 owners didn't have many high-profile exclusives to pick from this month, but Atari's *Transformers* bucked the trend of licensed game shoddiness to earn 8/10 scores in both *Edge* and the *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine*. The latter felt that the game "easily sits among the very best visuals the PS2 has produced" and praised it for "a heady mix of free-roaming exploration and mechanical scrapping spread over eight enormous and stunningly realised environments", though withheld a higher score due to "a difficulty level that borders on sadistic". The official magazine also felt that karaoke party game *Singstar* "genuinely improved our singing" and scored it 9/10. There were some good multiplatform games to enjoy too, including EA's boxing game *Fight Night 2004* (*Official PS2* 8/10, *Official Xbox* 8.5/10) and horror FPS *The Suffering* (*Official PS2* 8/10, *Official Xbox* 8.0/10).

Over on the PC, the big game of the month was *Unreal Tournament 2004*, the latest in the series of competitive FPS games. "While still very much in the same vein, the improvements are so varied, so polished and deep as to make any devotee of the genre consider upgrading", said *Edge*, comparing it to its predecessor. Comparing it to the more realistic likes of *Battlefield*, *GamesMaster* advised that "if you're fed up with all these one-shot-and-you're-dead combat simulators, *Unreal 2004* makes for an explosive antidote". *Edge* scored the game 8/10, praising the introduction of vehicles, the return of Assault mode and the brand new Onslaught mode maps. *GamesMaster* was similarly pleased, offering it 87%.

But the big surprise of the month was *Psyvariar 2: The Will To Fabricate* on the Dreamcast, which apparently hadn't got the message about its own demise. The arcade shoot-'em-up port was felt by *Edge* to be "superior in every respect" to its predecessor, being an "engaging and attractive blaster, then, blessed with an intricate shooting system". Only "the condensed lifespan" kept it from reaching above 7/10.

Join us again next time, as we inch ever closer towards the promise of those new handheld consoles. *

CHARTS

MAY 2004

PLAYSTATION 2

1 – James Bond 007: Everything Or Nothing (EA)
2 – Final Fantasy X-2 (Square)
3 – Sonic Heroes (Sega)
4 – SOCOM II: US Navy Seals (Sony)
5 – The Simpsons: Hit & Run (Vivendi)

XBOX

1 – Deus Ex: Invisible War (Eidos)
2 – LMA Manager 2004 (Codemasters)
3 – James Bond 007: Everything Or Nothing (EA)
4 – Tenchu: Return From Darkness (Activision)
5 – Sonic Heroes (Sega)

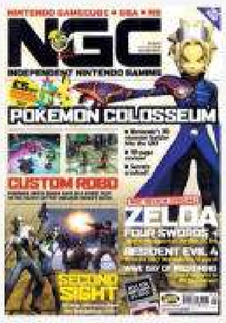
US (ALL FORMATS)

1 – Ninja Gaiden (Tecmo)
2 – James Bond 007: Everything Or Nothing (EA)
3 – The Hobbit (Sierra Entertainment)
4 – MVP Baseball 2004 (EA)
5 – Microsoft Flight Simulator 2004 (Microsoft)

MUSIC

1 – FURB (F U Right Back) (Frankee)
2 – F**k It (I Don't Want You Back) (Eamon)
3 – Irish Blood English Heart (Morrissey)
4 – Dip It Low (Christina Milian)
5 – Don't Tell Me (Avril Lavigne)

THIS MONTH IN…



NGC

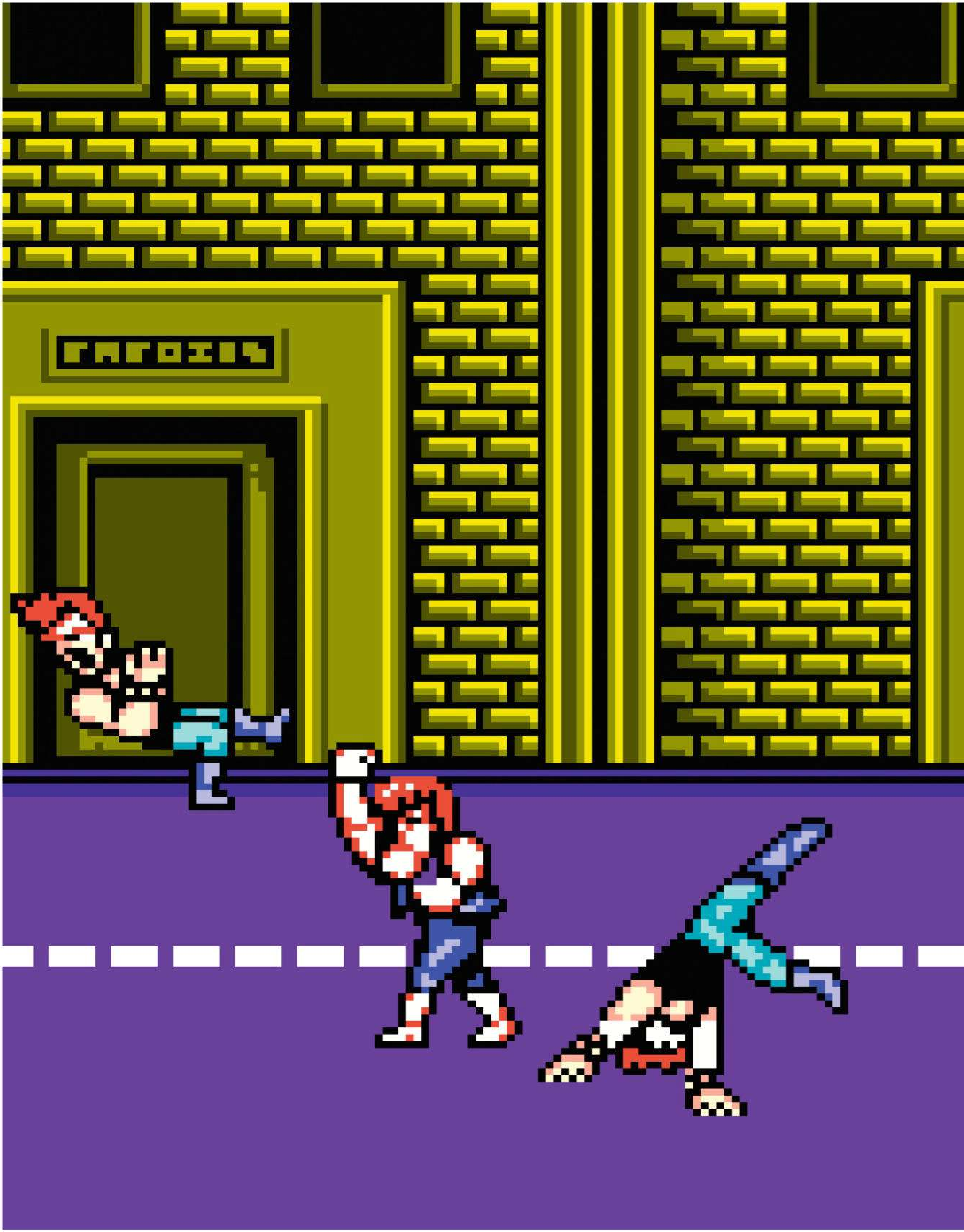
Ahead of E3, the team rags on Nintendo's past show offerings. "Please – no more updated retro nonsense," the magazine begs. "*Pac-Man Vs* was nice, but you can't make something like that your big news". Also criticised: "the '*Conker*' bar, complete with a 'no-minors' door policy and disinterested ladies handing out weak baby-lager". Ouch.

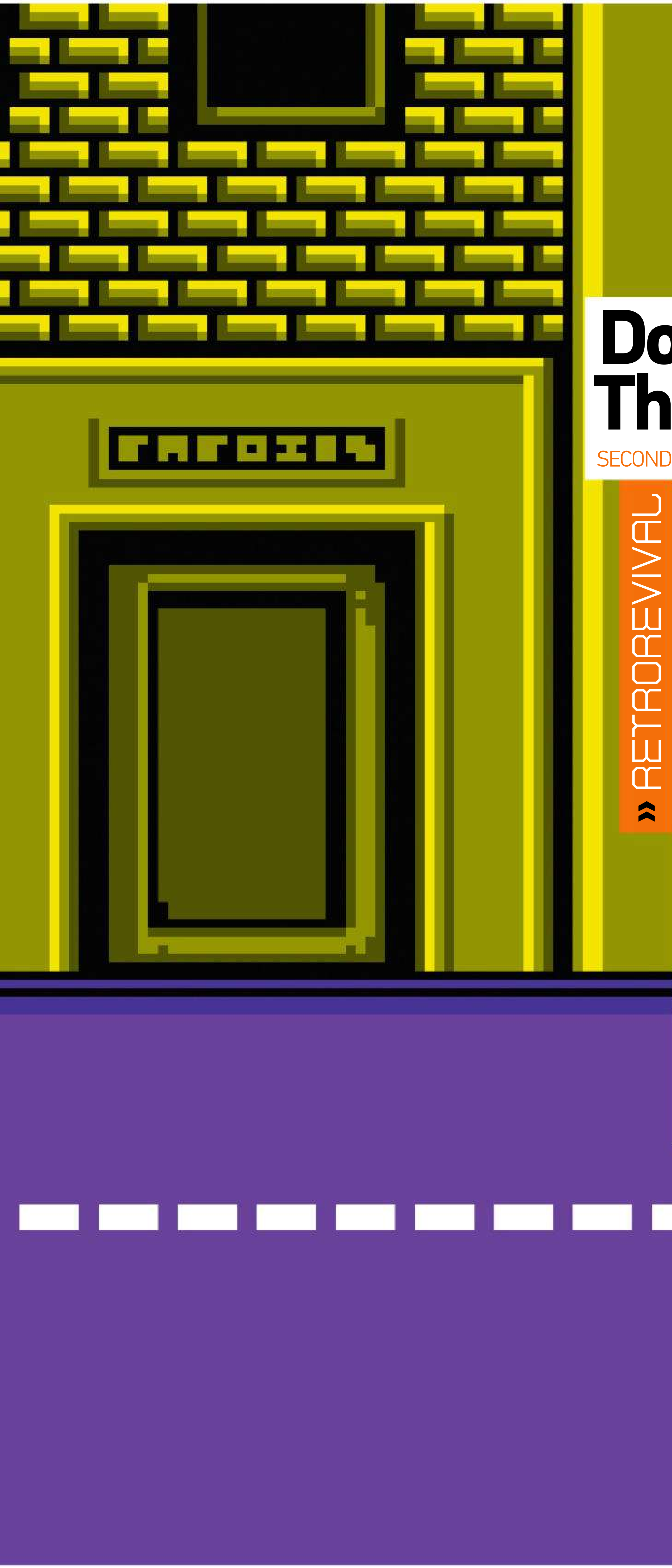
Official Xbox Magazine

"It's being touted as a game that could shift as many Xbox consoles as *Halo*," says the mag. That's right – *Pro Evolution Soccer* is heading to Xbox. But it might not be quite everything you've dreamed of. "When contacted, a Konami spokesman would only say 'we're not talking about Xbox Live yet.'"

Official PlayStation 2 Magazine

Reader Vincent Cook is convinced online gaming will never take off. "Playing against someone from Poland or Australia? Why would I even want to play against someone I don't even know? Who would? Online gaming is just a fad". Clearly, he hasn't received enough voice chat abuse from 13 year olds.





Double Dragon II: The Revenge

SECOND CHANCE SUCCESS

» NES » 1989 » Technos

I've won a few games in competitions over the years, and the first one I can remember was *Double Dragon II: The Revenge*. Having won a new kettle just when we needed one at the first time of asking, my mum would always enter the school tombola thereafter, and one year we won this game. The only problem was that we didn't have a NES, so we gave the game to the only person we knew that did own one, a friend of mine named Isaac. When I was given a NES some years later, I was curious to see what I'd missed out on and asked him if I could borrow the game. I had no expectation of keeping it, but he very kindly gifted it back to me.

I got home, put the game on and less than an hour later, I had turned it off again. I made a couple more attempts at playing it over the next few days, but never got very far before frustration set in. If you've never played the game before, it has a distinctive control system in which the B button is designated for left-facing attacks and A for the right. This was different to the original *Double Dragon* on both NES and Master System, and pretty much any other beat-'em-up I'd ever played at that time, and I *loathed* the game for it.

Only last year did I begin to regard the NES version of *Double Dragon II: The Revenge* with any kind of fondness. I was convinced to give it a second chance while testing out the control fixes for the Evercade, and was pleasantly surprised by how much I enjoyed it. With prior awareness of the control oddities and a greater tolerance for them, I was better able to appreciate its positive attributes, particularly cool environmental hazards like being dragged towards an open helicopter door. I hadn't given much thought to giving the game a second chance before that, but I'm so glad I did as I'm now able to appreciate that stroke of luck from all those years ago. *

Back To The 90s

WORDS BY

NICK THORPE, LEWIS PACKWOOD & ADAM BARNES

FEW ERAS OF GAMING EXCITED LIKE THE NINETIES DID. THE DECADE SPANNED SEVERAL GENERATIONS OF HARDWARE, INTRODUCED A COLOURFUL RANGE OF CHARACTERS AND SAW GAMES GO TRULY MAINSTREAM. JOIN US THEN, AS WE COVER TEN YEARS OF GAMING EXCELLENCE

From the earliest days of the coin-op market to today's world of blazing fast SSDs and ray-tracing, there has always been someone ready to tell you that *their* game, *their* hardware, is the next big thing. Videogames are always evolving, after all. But for those of us who lived through the Nineties, it's hard to deny that everything just seemed to move that little bit quicker, as the decade brought about possibly the most astonishing changes in gaming history.

Across the world, the console market became the focus of the gaming industry. Sega and Nintendo clashed with their 16-bit machines, creating a fierce rivalry that brought out the best in both manufacturers and made console development more attractive for third parties. Meanwhile, the handheld market that emerged in the final months of the Eighties truly took off, allowing gamers to take their hobby out on the road in a meaningful way. The arcades experienced a renaissance too, thanks to *Street Fighter II*'s competitive revolution and the fighting game boom that followed.

The middle of the decade was also characterised by the race to succeed traditional graphical technologies. For a time it looked as though the large capacity of CD-ROMs had convinced the industry that interactive video was the way forward, and Virtuality was extremely keen to sell its pods as the future of arcade gaming. But the true leap forward was the development of 3D graphics hardware that was fast enough to handle action games, initially as part of an arcade arms race between Sega and Namco, and by the middle of the decade in home consoles too as electronics giants like Panasonic and Sony saw an opportunity in the market.

It's fair to say that the Nineties was when gaming became a big business, and some will lament that. With the decline of the home-computer scene, we lost the open platforms and bedroom-coding scene that produced so many quirky, innovative games and developers. But the arrival of the money men was by no means exclusively negative – as team sizes ballooned and development budgets soared, players were treated to games of previously unimaginable scale and ambition. Just ask anyone who experienced first-hand the realism of *Virtua Fighter*'s animations, the sheer joy of movement in *Super Mario 64* or the cinematic flair of *Final Fantasy VII* – it seemed as though new ground was constantly being broken.

Of course, success inevitably means mainstream attention, and not all of it was positive. But while some sought to create controversy over the violence in *Mortal Kombat* and *Doom*, we also saw our hobby consistently represented on TV. With seemingly unassailable titans like Commodore and Ocean ceasing to be, and new experiences like rhythm action games rising to prominence, the Nineties was a tumultuous time for sure. But anyone who lived through the decade will very likely remember how exciting everything seemed at the time, and will hopefully relive some of those thrills over the following pages. ▶

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FORMER CVG/ MEGATECH EDITOR

DALEY EVE JOHNSON
GAME DESIGNER, PLAYTONIC GAMES

PAUL MONAGHAN
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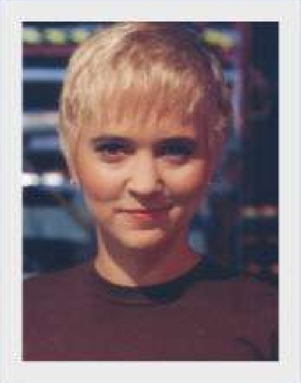


VIOLET BERLIN
PRESENTER, BAD INFLUENCE

DAVID BREVIK
COFOUNDER, BLIZZARD NORTH

LOUIS CASTLE
COFOUNDER, WESTWOOD STUDIOS

ELLIOT COLL
YOUTUBER, THE RETRO FUTURE

MEGA MACHINES!

GAME GEAR

1990

▶ Sega's first handheld console didn't boast loads of exclusive classics, but it was a good way to play popular games on the go. It sold millions of units, but was a distant second to the Game Boy.

AMSTRAD GX4000

1990

▶ Giving the ageing CPC 464 a hardware refresh, Amstrad attempted to take on the console market. It quickly sank without trace, having arrived just as the 16-bit consoles started to dominate.

SUPER NINTENDO

1990

▶ Faced with credible competition, Nintendo created an astonishingly capable console and provided it with countless classic games. This truly legendary machine lasted much of the decade.

NEO GEO AES

1990

▶ SNK's powerhouse console was a dream come true for those who demanded arcade perfection. Though high prices meant it wasn't a mainstream product, the hardcore sustained it for years.

WATARA SUPERVISION

1992

▶ This handheld tried to emulate the success of the Game Boy with its low price and modest hardware, but the software library lacked both the quality and big names of Nintendo's console.

AMIGA 1200

1992

▶ The next generation Amiga was a welcome step up over the original chip set and hosted some fantastic games, but the rise of the IBM compatible PC unfortunately sealed its fate.

FM TOWNS MARTY

1993

▶ This console version of the classic Japanese computer had great hardware, but cost quite a lot and ended up losing the backing of Fujitsu's management before it could really gain traction.

AMIGA CD32

1993

▶ Commodore's last roll of the dice was an attempt to challenge the console market. It was too late to make a difference – after just seven months on sale, its manufacturer went bankrupt.

PLAYDIA

1994

▶ Bandai's console used a CD-ROM and boasted some impressive anime licensed games, almost all of which were edutainment focused with a bit of FMV. As you can imagine, it wasn't great.

32X

1994

▶ This Mega Drive upgrade module was supposed to keep players from buying 3DOs and Jaguars. Instead, it confused consumers who knew the Saturn was coming, and damaged Sega's brand.

SATURN

1994

▶ Sega's real 32-bit machine was great at 2D and had some amazing arcade conversions, but was hard to develop for and handled 3D oddly. Though pretty popular in Japan, it flopped internationally.

PLAYSTATION

1994

▶ Sony's debut hardware redefined console gaming. Though it initially impressed with conversions of hit 3D arcade games, more cinematic original games and a cool image sold it to over 100 million.

PIPPIN

1996

▶ Apple and Bandai teamed up to create this console – another CD-ROM format with some lofty multimedia goals. Much of its library consists of non-game and edutainment software.

NINTENDO 64

1996

▶ A late arrival and the decision to stick with cartridges meant that the N64 would never catch Sony, but raw 3D power and revolutionary game designs ensured it a permanent place in gamers' hearts.

GAME.COM

1997

▶ Tiger Electronics scored versions of some major games for this handheld thanks to its licensing prowess, but weak hardware and a truly dreadful display have ensured that it lives in infamy.

GAME BOY COLOR

1998

▶ For the first time ever, a handheld console offered both colour graphics and reasonable battery life, allowing Nintendo to extend the life of its old tech and continue its handheld dominance.

HARDWARE IS NOTHING WITHOUT GAMES, BUT IN THIS ERA OF UPHEAVAL, ASTONISHING TECHNOLOGICAL LEAPS GAVE DEVELOPERS AND PLAYERS SEEMINGLY INFINITE NEW POSSIBILITIES TO EXPLORE. WE PRESENT A SELECTION OF THE DECADE'S MOST NOTABLE MACHINES

PC ENGINE GT

1990

▶ NEC took the already diminutive PC Engine hardware and created the first true handheld version of a home console. It was amazing to see, but also expensive and very power hungry.

MEGA-CD

1991

▶ This expensive add-on gave the Mega Drive capabilities like sprite scaling and CD sound. Unfortunately, most of its developers were primarily interested in creating interactive movies.

PC ENGINE DUO

1991

▶ With the decline of HuCard software in favour of CD releases, NEC integrated the PC Engine and its CD-ROM add-on together. It was only popular in Japan, but got some amazing games there.

CD-I

1991

▶ Philips positioned this device as a multimedia CD-ROM player, but it received plenty of games. Unfortunately, some awful takes on Nintendo classics are what it's best remembered for.

LASERACTIVE

1993

▶ Pioneer's pricey laserdisc player accepted Mega Drive or PC Engine modules that allowed you to play exclusive Mega-LD and LD-ROM² laserdisc games as well as standard carts and HuCards.

3DO

1993

▶ One of the earliest 3D-capable consoles had some interesting games and an innovative business model, but more capable systems had arrived by the time the price became reasonable.

JAGUAR

1993

▶ Atari offered 3D gaming at a reasonable price, but struggled to source quality software to draw players to the platform. Three years later, Atari limped out of the console market for good.

NEO GEO CD

1994

▶ Freed from the shackles of cartridges, SNK could finally offer affordable Neo Geo games – just as the dawn of the 3D era drew the attention of players away from high-end 2D hardware.

PC-FX

1994

▶ Compared to the competition, NEC's successor to the PC Engine excelled at FMV and little else. This unmitigated disaster sold poorly and ended NEC's time as a console manufacturer.

VIRTUAL BOY

1995

▶ This tabletop console was a rare misfire from Nintendo. Though it could produce a convincing illusion of depth, it suffered from red and black graphics and its users from headaches and nausea.

LOOPY

1995

▶ Casio's unique console was marketed towards girls and featured a built-in sticker printer, around the time of the purikura boom. Only ten games were released, and the system never made much impact.

NOMAD

1995

▶ This fully portable version of the Mega Drive naturally boasted a great library, but had the same problems with bulk and battery life that the Game Gear did, and never left North America.

NEO GEO POCKET

1998

▶ SNK released its monochrome handheld just a week after the Game Boy Color, and quickly realised it was outmatched. Only ten games were released before the console's colour successor arrived.

DREAMCAST

1998

▶ Sega's successor to the Saturn was an affordable and developer-friendly machine. Unfortunately, precarious finances and lack of trust from players meant that it would be the company's last.

WONDERSWAN

1999

▶ Bandai hoped that this cheap and cheerful black and white handheld, designed by the late Gunpei Yokoi, would topple its colour competition. It didn't, but it did find a following in Japan.

NEO GEO POCKET COLOR

1999

▶ Following an abortive Japan-only monochrome model, SNK released this great 16-bit handheld internationally and was developing a niche market before financial troubles cut it short. ▶

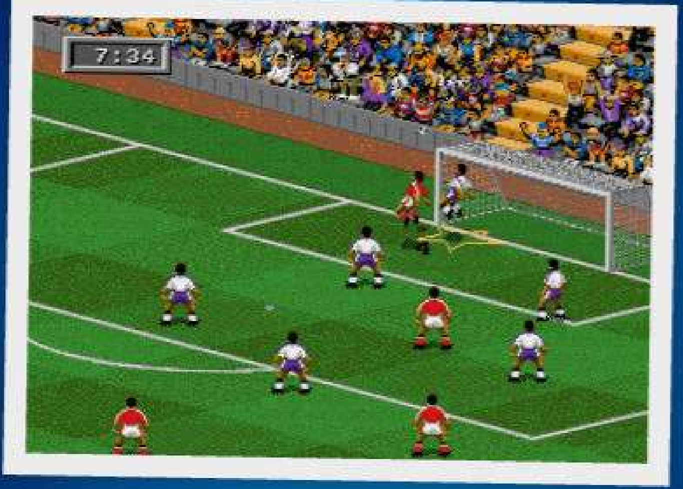
FROM BEDROOMS TO FRONT ROOMS!

OVER THE COURSE OF THE NINETIES, THE RISE OF THE CONSOLES MADE VIDEOGAMES INTO A BIGGER PHENOMENON THAN THEY'D EVER BEEN BEFORE, WITH PLAYGROUND RIVALRIES GIVING WAY TO UNPRECEDENTED MAINSTREAM CREDIBILITY

At the beginning of the Nineties, gaming was still very much stuck in the Eighties. In the UK, the most popular gaming systems were still the home computers, with many a youngster still enjoying the delights of the Spectrum and Commodore 64. Elsewhere in the world, Nintendo's NES dominated gaming. All of these systems were technically from the early Eighties, and many players were getting ready to move on, with hardware manufacturers trying to tempt them to leap to their machines.

"I worked on *CVG* in 1989, and during that year things like PC Engine had already come out and Mega Drive was around," says Paul Glancey, a veteran of games journalism who later moved into game production. "The Amiga had got past its slow-ish start, and it was getting more of the big titles than the ST. I think that point, 1990, people were trying to make a choice between Amiga and import consoles." Many players would learn about those consoles via *CVG*'s Mean Machines section, which had grown in popularity since its 1987 introduction. "We were talking to computer game publishers like Ocean and saying 'are you bringing this out on Nintendo or Sega?' They were already interested in what they could do on that hardware, so we knew that consoles were going to be a big thing in the next couple of years, and that's what prompted Julian Rignall to expand Mean Machines into its own magazine," Paul remembers.

Sega introduced the Mega Drive to Europe in 1990, and a year later it was sufficiently popular that EMAP launched the dedicated magazine *MegaTech*, with Paul at the helm as editor. "It was all done with a very small staff in a bit of a rush," he recalls. Nintendo followed with the SNES in 1992, and a console war soon erupted – though as Paul recalls, "Sega had a bit more of a presence in the UK. Virgin Mastertronic were pretty hot on marketing the Sega consoles, and they just kind of had a bit more credibility, they had a bit more of a cool edge than the Super Nintendo at the time." That was a key strategy for Sega, which was hoping to age up the console gaming audience both in the UK and in North America, where it was neck and neck with its rival.



» [Mega Drive] A strong emphasis on sports games helped the Mega Drive to age up the gaming demographic.

The combined force of the rival 16-bit machines pushed UK console gaming revenues past those of computer games that year, as it became clear that players had chosen their way forward. "Amiga was still quite expensive, but if you had a computer it was probably easier and cheaper to get games because it was easier to pirate games, I guess," says Paul. "But it felt like there was a higher quality of software on the consoles – fair enough, an Amiga

IN MEMORIAM

THE FAMILIAR NAMES WE LOST AS CONSOLE GAMING EXPLODED IN POPULARITY

RoadBlasters
MATCHBOX TOYS (U.S.A.) LTD.
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LICENSED TO ATARI CORP.
MULTIPLIER
1x SCORE
FUEL
SCORE
SPEED

ATARI CORPORATION

▶ Jack Tramiel had inherited plenty of history when he bought Atari's assets from Warner Communications in 1984, and that came to an end in 1996. The company's line of home computers had ceased to be profitable, and its Jaguar console was severely outclassed. With losses mounting, the company withdrew from the scene.

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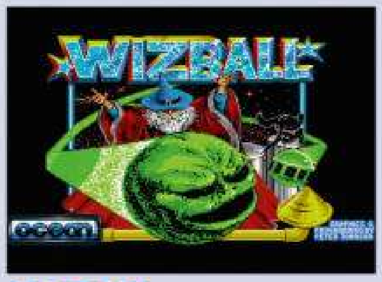
(C) 1983 COMMODORE
AND HAL LABORATORY
BONUS POINTS 100 x1
COMMODORE

COMMODORE INTERNATIONAL

▶ With PCs taking over the business computing market and consoles taking over gaming, Commodore tried to transition towards console manufacturing in the Nineties, but failed to break through. Its best shot was the Amiga CD32 in 1993, but by then the decline was irreversible, and Commodore filed for bankruptcy in 1994.



OCEAN SOFTWARE

▶ Having gained an incredible reputation during the 8-bit years for licensed games and arcade conversions, Ocean successfully transitioned to consoles, and particularly the Nintendo market. However, the Manchester-based publisher was swallowed in a merger with Infogrames in 1996, and the brand ceased to be used following 1998.

Bally MIDWAY
SPY HUNTER
OFFICIAL ARCADE GAME
U.S. GOLD
OFFICIAL SEGA ARCADE GAME

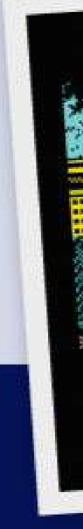
US GOLD

▶ Another big name from the 8-bit era, US Gold successfully transitioned to console publishing, particularly the Sega range in the early years. The company also survived just long enough to push out PlayStation games such as *Olympic Soccer*, before being acquired with distributor CentreSoft by Eidos for £17.6 million in 1996.

SPELLBOUND
MASTERTRONIC ADDED DIMENSION

MASTERTRONIC

▶ The erstwhile budget game titan was deep into selling Sega products by 1991, with almost all of the company's turnover coming from the console market. To that end, Sega bought the company to function as its European branch, handling marketing and distribution, with the small publishing arm spun off as Virgin Games.



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SONY
SUPER NINTENDO

can do all kinds of things and it does pretty good games, but look at the Mega Drive *Ghouls 'N Ghosts*, for example. The dream then was always having an arcade perfect version of the game, and although Amiga tried to do that and did quite well in a lot of examples, the Mega Drive came along and it was like having arcade games – there were no lumpy bits, no loading, and it felt like the real deal in a lot of ways."

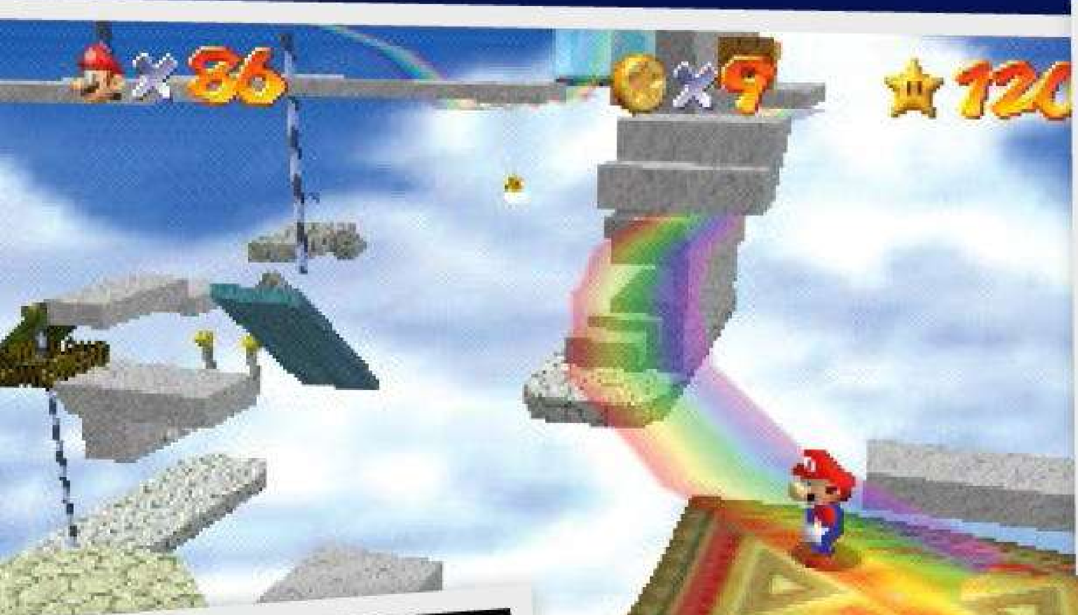
Consoles had risen to prominence, and major game launches could bring in millions in days. But this would all be taken to the next level in the next generation. "The Saturn and PlayStation came along and they were expensive, but again there was still that 'I'm going to get arcade perfect versions of these games that I love', like *Sega Rally* or *Ridge Racer*," says Paul. But Sega soon lost its cool, and it was Sony that truly changed things by aiming primarily at adults. "That generation who'd grown up, they'd maybe got a Mega Drive or a SNES when they were 12 or 13, they were getting a bit older and maybe had a bit of money," says Paul. "Also with PlayStation, that whole Nineties rave scene – Sony were able to plug into that, and that gave them a little bit of an edge over Sega. Again, it just became 'these are the coolest machines to have right now.'"

The adult audiance certainly wasn't for everyone – firmly focused on family entertainment, Nintendo sold a respectable number of N64 consoles, though it did fail to surpass the sales of the SNES. However, there was no getting around the success of the PlayStation, which eventually became the first home console ever to sell over 100 million units. The credibility of the Sony brand and pop culture ties like the licensed music of *WipEout* made it something you'd be happy to have in your living room. And then, just as the consoles eclipsed the home computers, they began to supplant the arcades too. "This is only my perception, but you could have an arcade experience without having to leave the house," replies Paul when asked why that happened. "At that point, arcades were starting to feel the pinch. They had to put these sit-down ride machines, or be a big-screen gun game or something like that, so that it would be something where you'd go 'I'll play this because I can't play this at home.'" By the end of the decade, home and arcade hardware had reached near parity with the Dreamcast and NAOMI arcade board.

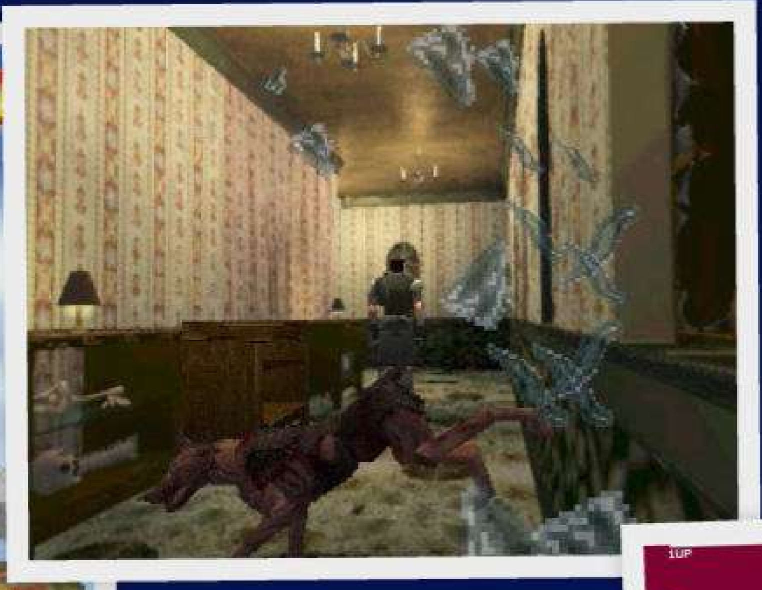
Consoles had taken over, then – but in the process, there were more gamers out there than ever before, and wider acceptance of them too. ▶

» [SNES] Having great versions of arcade hits helped consoles prevail over the 16-bit computers.

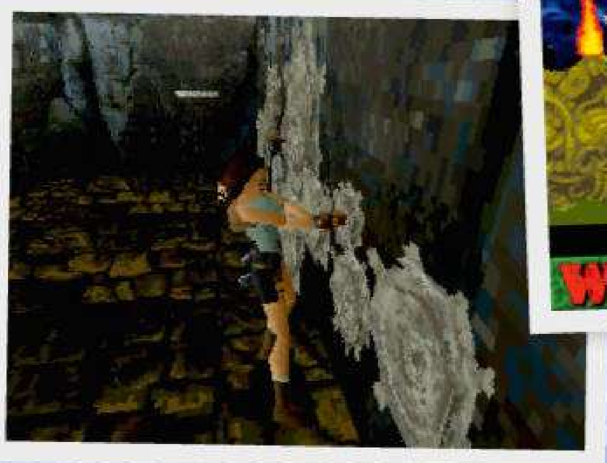
» [PlayStation] Sony made further inroads with adult gamers, thanks to games with mature themes like *Resident Evil*.



» [N64] Family games will always have a place in the mainstream, as *Super Mario 64* deftly showed.



» [Saturn] *Tomb Raider* caught the imagination of the wider public, though Sega's console felt little benefit.



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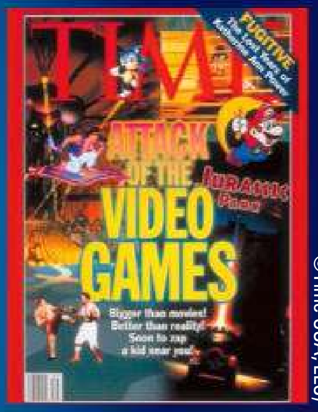
TIME
FUGITIVE
ATTACK OF THE VIDEO GAMES
Jurassic Park
Bigger than movies! Better than reality! Soon to zap a kid near you!

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MAINSTREAM MOMENTS

THE KEY EVENTS THAT SHOWED THAT THE WORLD WAS TAKING NOTICE

1992

▶ The launch of *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* receives widespread international television news coverage.

1993

▶ *Time Magazine* features Sonic, Mario and more on its 'Attack Of The Videogames' cover feature.

1995

▶ Sony secures the installation of the PlayStation Room at the Ministry Of Sound nightclub.

1997

▶ Lara Croft appears on the front cover of fashion and pop culture magazine *The Face*.

1999

▶ Sony ships 71.82 million PlayStations by year end, making it the best-selling home console to date.

SPECTACULAR SUPERSTARS!

AT ONE TIME IT SEEMED THAT EVERYTHING NEEDED A MASCOT, AND PREFERABLY ONE BASED ON A REASONABLY OBSCURE MAMMAL. BUT AS WELL AS EMBRACING THAT TREND, THE NINETIES REDEFINED WHAT A VIDEOGAME MASCOT COULD BE

Sometimes, one major hit can transform the entire gaming world. It happened with *Space Invaders* in the Seventies, it happened with *Super Mario Bros* in the Eighties, and in the early Nineties, *Sonic The Hedgehog* near single-handedly propelled Sega to international credibility and cool. “When *Sonic* came out on Mega Drive, it gave it such a massive kick – it was quite a young audience, but it was quite an aspirational thing. It just looked cool,” says Paul Glancey, formerly of *CVG* and other magazines. “As a character and as a game, it had such a massive impact, and certainly it gave Sega a massive advantage in certain ways. Hedgehog with attitude versus cute plumber – maybe *Mario* was the better game, but Sonic just had a bit more of an edge to him, and that seemed important at the time.”

A craze quickly kicked off in the wake of that success, and there were a lot of copycat characters. “Yes, some dreadful ones,” Paul adds. Furry creatures with some form of distinguishing trait quickly flooded the market. Bubsy had his fully voiced wisecracks, Rocky Rodent had his punk hairstyle and Gex had an unfortunate addiction to TV. Of course, while animal characters were the safe bet – you could always find weirder examples elsewhere, like Sega’s bizarre and frankly unnecessary hardcore pencil, Wild Woody.

Having a killer mascot wasn’t a major anxiety on the SNES, where Mario’s place at the head of the table was secure, but on the home computers every platform star seemed to be touted as a Sonic-beater. “There was a bit of… ‘pollution’ seems like a strong word, but a lot of the Amiga titles ended up being converted and they maybe weren’t such high quality either. They were decent, they would make good Amiga games, but on Mega Drive they just didn’t look quite as good,” Paul says.

Of course, mascots weren’t just limited to platform games, either. Plenty of famous faces lent their star power to spin-offs as necessary, whether they were battling in puzzle games like *Kirby’s Avalanche* or actually punching each other’s faces off as in *Sonic The Fighters*. But with that kind of star power, mascots were often roped into dubious junk-food marketing schemes – James Pond would happily hawk Penguin biscuit bars at you, Zool really wanted you to have some Chupa Chups, and Cool Spot was literally a fizzy drink logo on legs. With in-game marketing being very new territory, that was the sort of thing that developers could get away with.

» [Amiga] Zool wasn’t actually intended as a challenger to Sonic and Mario, but was received as such by the press.

By the mid-Nineties, reviewers seemed to be a little bit sick of the platform genre and every cuddly critter within it. Burnt out from years of Awesome Possum and Radical Rex, only something truly astonishing like *Donkey Kong Country* could break through the barrier of cynicism. But after the mid-Nineties, our understanding of mascots began to change. A new wave of characters attached to brand-new 3D gameplay revived interest in the genre, and while the likes of *Crash Bandicoot* and *Spyro The Dragon* sold like hotcakes, Sony never felt the need to officially adopt a mascot. Meanwhile, Lara Croft proved that a fairly regular looking human who relied on guns and grit could be the perfect face of a franchise, and maybe even an industry.

And of course, arguably the biggest mascot franchise of the Nineties doesn’t have a single face, nor is it primarily a platform series. *Pokémon* is an RPG series, and even amongst the first 251 monsters introduced in the Nineties, there are plenty of series mascots beyond Pikachu that inspire more love and affection amongst their fans than many leading characters ever have. Let’s be honest, poor old Croc doesn’t really have anything on Snorlax, let alone the likes of Squirtle and Charizard.

These days, we don’t see so many new mascots because console manufacturers don’t feel they need them. But if the fan appeal of spiritual successors like *Yooka-Laylee* and the nostalgic success of games like *Sonic Mania* and *Crash Bandicoot: N Sane Trilogy* are anything to go by, the survivors of the Nineties will be around for a long time to come. ▶

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» [N64] The Pokémon can step into any genre they want – puzzle games would just be another conquest.

BANJO & KAZOOIE

1998

▶ The bird and the bear are huge favourites with the N64 fraternity, with two excellent platformers on that console to their credit. They’ve been rather quiet since, with their Xbox 360 outing *Nuts & Bolts* dividing fans, but their inclusion in *Super Smash Bros Ultimate* caused many to rejoice.

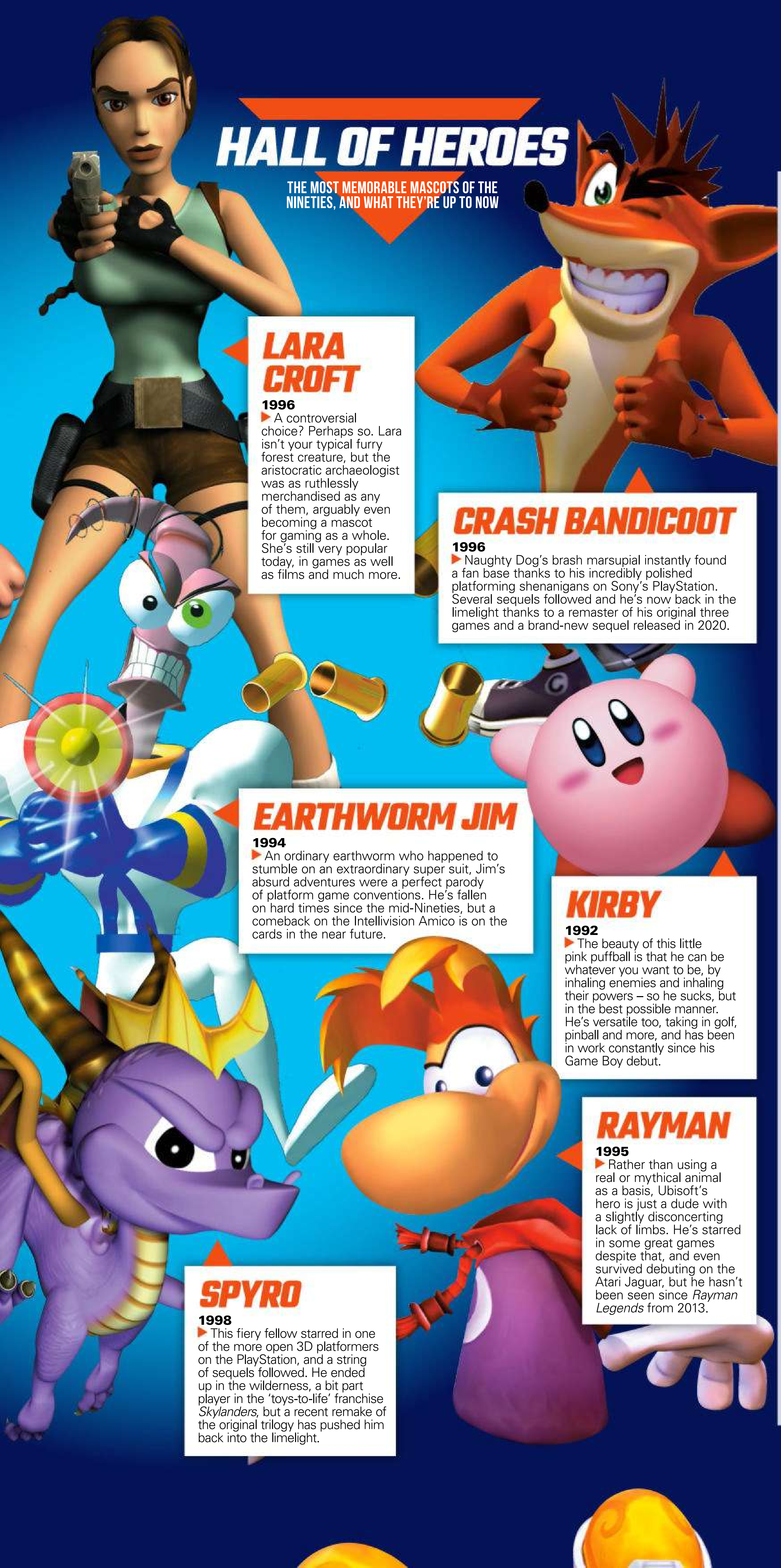
SONIC

1991

▶ Sega’s spiky speedster is arguably *the* mascot of the Nineties, propelling the Mega Drive to incredible success. His absence on the Saturn was missed, and his glorious Dreamcast return in 1998 led to a controversial run of 3D games. Recent Hollywood success proves that he’s pretty evergreen.

HALL OF HEROES

THE MOST MEMORABLE MASCOTS OF THE NINETIES, AND WHAT THEY'RE UP TO NOW



LARA CROFT

1996

A controversial choice? Perhaps so. Lara isn't your typical furry forest creature, but the aristocratic archaeologist was as ruthlessly merchandised as any of them, arguably even becoming a mascot for gaming as a whole. She's still very popular today, in games as well as films and much more.

CRASH BANDICOOT

1996

Naughty Dog's brash marsupial instantly found a fan base thanks to his incredibly polished platforming shenanigans on Sony's PlayStation. Several sequels followed and he's now back in the limelight thanks to a remaster of his original three games and a brand-new sequel released in 2020.

EARTHWORM JIM

1994

An ordinary earthworm who happened to stumble on an extraordinary super suit, Jim's absurd adventures were a perfect parody of platform game conventions. He's fallen on hard times since the mid-Nineties, but a comeback on the Intellivision Amico is on the cards in the near future.

KIRBY

1992

The beauty of this little pink puffball is that he can be whatever you want to be, by inhaling enemies and inhaling their powers – so he sucks, but in the best possible manner. He's versatile too, taking in golf, pinball and more, and has been in work constantly since his Game Boy debut.

RAYMAN

1995

Rather than using a real or mythical animal as a basis, Ubisoft's hero is just a dude with a slightly disconcerting lack of limbs. He's starred in some great games despite that, and even survived debuting on the Atari Jaguar, but he hasn't been seen since *Rayman Legends* from 2013.

SPYRO

1998

This fiery fellow starred in one of the more open 3D platformers on the PlayStation, and a string of sequels followed. He ended up in the wilderness, a bit part player in the 'toys-to-life' franchise *Skylanders*, but a recent remake of the original trilogy has pushed him back into the limelight.

MASCOT MANIAC

DALEY EVE JOHNSON LOOKS BACK AT THE MASCOTS THAT INSPIRED HER TO BECOME A GAME DESIGNER AT YOOKA-LAYLEE DEVELOPER PLAYTONIC GAMES

Which is the first videogame mascot you can remember becoming a fan of? Did you first encounter them through their games, or something else?
It's gotta be Donkey Kong, the one in *Donkey Kong Country*, the grandson or son (depends which side of the debate you sit on) of the arcade/NES *Donkey Kong*. I knew of Mario too, but kid me deemed a gorilla wearing a red tie much more appealing than a moustachioed-mushroom-munching man. That's not to say I don't love Mario, I do. I've changed since then. I love you, Mario.

Though mascot characters appeared in all kinds of games during the Nineties, they were most commonly platform game stars. Why do you think that was?
A lot of it had to be influenced by Mario, right? The *Super Mario* games were system sellers, and so this idea of platforming game plus cool mascot was proven to have some real value and appeal. It worked for Nintendo, it was going to work for others! There's also something to be said for how important theming is for platforming games. They contain a medley of environmental art, collectibles, lives, baddies and bosses. You had to have an anchor for all of that – and that anchor was the mascot.

Do you think it's fair to say that the move to 3D-capable consoles helped to revitalise waning interest in mascots?
In the cases of games like *Spyro*, *Crash* and *Banjo-Kazooie*, what they all have in common is that they were new IPs *plus* they had brand new bangin' 3D graphics. It was a whole glorious generation of even more polygons and new characters to get to know. As for the mascots who came into 3D from 2D, there was some excitement in seeing the characters realised in a whole extra dimension. My mind was blown when I rolled around in a 3D space as Donkey Kong for the first (and 100th) time.

Some Nineties mascots are still going strong today, but plenty of others didn't last. If you could give any a second chance, which would you choose and why?
Cool Spot – I know this guy was a walking 7-Up ad, but he had style. Who else is going to murder giant crabs with the unbridled force of fancy lemonade? Plok threw limbs before it was cool, I miss him. He said words like 'diddled' and got unreasonably angry about his flag being stolen. If I could swap Rayman out for Plok I would. Gex – Gex is terrible, and that's exactly why I want him back. Bubsy did come back for a bit, but I'm not sure it went very well for him. If you ask me, Bubsy is a cursed mascot, even his creators hated him, but I don't. Let's give him a third chance?

In recent years, mascot platformers have experienced a resurgence in popularity – not just old favourites, but new games like *Yooka-Laylee* too. Why do you think they're proving so popular again?
I'm thinking (hoping) it's a general shift toward feel-good games. I feel like people can really stress themselves out with intense, dramatic, gloomy games, but in recent years I've started to see a change. People are becoming more receptive to chilled out and cutesy games and I reckon this at least plays some part in it!

MAGNIFICENT MAGAZINES!

THE NINETIES SAW A DELUGE OF NEW GAMING MAGAZINES COVERING EVERY FORMAT – AND A BRAND OF ANARCHIC JOURNALISM WE WON'T SEE THE LIKES OF AGAIN

ZERO
OPERATION STEALTH
MEAN MACHINES
Super Play
FINAL FIGHT
BAD influence!
FIVE GREAT COMPOS
Official magazine of TV'S most watched video games show
ONLY £1.95
Andy and Violet battle their way through the latest games
JOIN THE GAME CREATORS
WHAT'S HOT AND WHAT'S NOT

What made Nineties videogame magazines so special? For Paul Monaghan of retro gaming podcast *Maximum Power Up*, it was all about the writers. "Some of the biggest names, like Jaz Rignall, Gary Penn, Steve Jarratt and Gary Whitta, started out in the Eighties, yet by the time the Nineties hit they were like rock stars to some of us," he says. "They were names you knew and could trust."

Paul and co-host Phil Hockaday began *Maximum Power Up* in 2015 with the aim of covering various gaming topics, but the podcast has developed a reputation for its magazine output. So far they've interviewed around 40 big names from retro games magazines. For Paul, it's about recording an oral history of the era. "The games magazines of the Nineties were a very special time and place," he says, "and hopefully the interviews I have done will help explain why."

As consoles rose in popularity, the Nineties saw a boom period for games magazines, and major publishers often had several titles covering the same format. One of the first magazines to capitalise on this console enthusiasm was *Mean Machines* in 1990, and its anarchic style and superstar cast of writers made it an instant hit. It lasted just two years, but it made a massive impact. "Almost 30 years on, the magazine is still highly thought of," says Paul.

Newsagents' shelves groaned under the weight of the vast range of Nineties gaming mags. Some were short-lived: titles like *Maximum, Games-X, Bad Influence! Magazine* and *Arcade* lasted just a year or two. But some, like *GamesMaster* (1993-2018) and *PC Zone* (1993-2010), lived to a grand old age, and *Amiga Format* survived until 2000, long after the Amiga itself keeled over and died. A few Nineties magazines are still around today, like *PC Gamer* and the revolutionary *Edge* magazine.

Some magazines burned especially bright before their untimely demise. Paul has a soft spot for the multiformat magazine *Zero* thanks to its mix of clever humour and talented writers, including Matt Bielby and Jonathan Davies, who both went on to join the phenomenal *Amiga Power*. *Zero* folded in 1992 after just three years. But Paul's personal favourite from this era is *Super Play* (1992–1996), with its beautiful anime-style covers and focus on Japanese games.

One key facet of Nineties magazines was the increasingly elaborate freebies that graced their front covers. Every other magazine seemed to have tips books, stickers or VHS tapes, and memorably, issue 4 of *Nintendo Magazine System* came with the full CD soundtrack to *Street Fighter II*. Atari ST and Amiga magazines also often had more than one cover disk. "At one point *Amiga Action* had FOUR disks on the cover, and even needed thicker paper to help protect the cover from ripping," says Paul.

But in the end, what made Nineties magazines stand out was the sheer quality of the writing. "The likes of Jaz Rignall, Paul Davies and Richard Leadbetter helped mould magazines like *CVG*, *Official Sega Magazine* and *Mean Machines Sega* into must read titles," says Paul. "The passion was always so easy to see."

RECOMMENDED READING

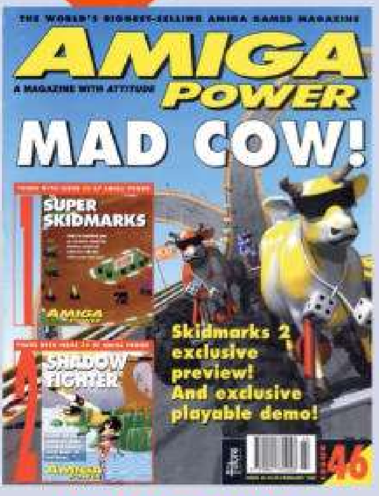
THE MAGAZINES THAT DEFINED THE NINETIES

MEAN MACHINES

Launch Year: 1990

▶ Former *Zzap!64* editor Julian 'Jaz' Rignall convinced the EMAP bosses to let him create a magazine dedicated to the exciting new consoles emerging from Japan, and *Mean Machines* was born, becoming an instant sell-out hit. It was split into *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System* in 1992.

THE WORLD'S BEST CONSOLES MAG!!!
£1.75
MEAN MACHINES
FREE!!! AMAZING STICKERS!


AMIGA POWER
MAD COW!
SUPER SKIDMARKS
Skidmarks 2 exclusive preview! And exclusive playable demo!
46

AMIGA POWER

Launch year: 1991

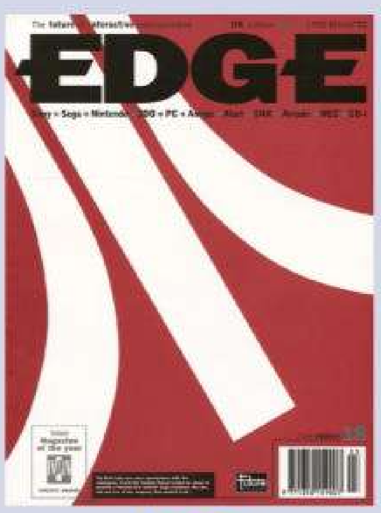
▶ The Mighty Beings of *Amiga Power* dedicated themselves to Disseminating the Truth, and their resulting harsh but fair reviews sometimes led to ongoing feuds with publishers. The magazine was packed with in-jokes and running gags, and later issues were filled with entertainingly bizarre features on topics like Office Joust.

SUPER PLAY

Launch year: 1992

▶ Wil Overton's beautiful covers reflected the growing Western fascination with anime in the Nineties, and *Super Play* made a name for itself through its extensive coverage of JRPGs and imported SNES games. "In a pre-internet but import friendly era, the magazine was like a bible for so many gamers," says Paul.

100% FOR SUPER NINTENDO PLAYERS
INDEPENDENT SUPER NINTENDO MAGAZINE
Super PLAY
25
SECRET OF MANA
REVIEWED!



EDGE

Launch year: 1993

▶ Most Nineties games magazines were aimed at children and teenagers, but *Edge* was focused squarely at adults, with a more serious take on cutting-edge technology. Issue 1 famously came in a mysterious black bag, and the decision to remove author bylines was the antithesis of the rockstar-journalist trend of the time.

OFFICIAL UK PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE

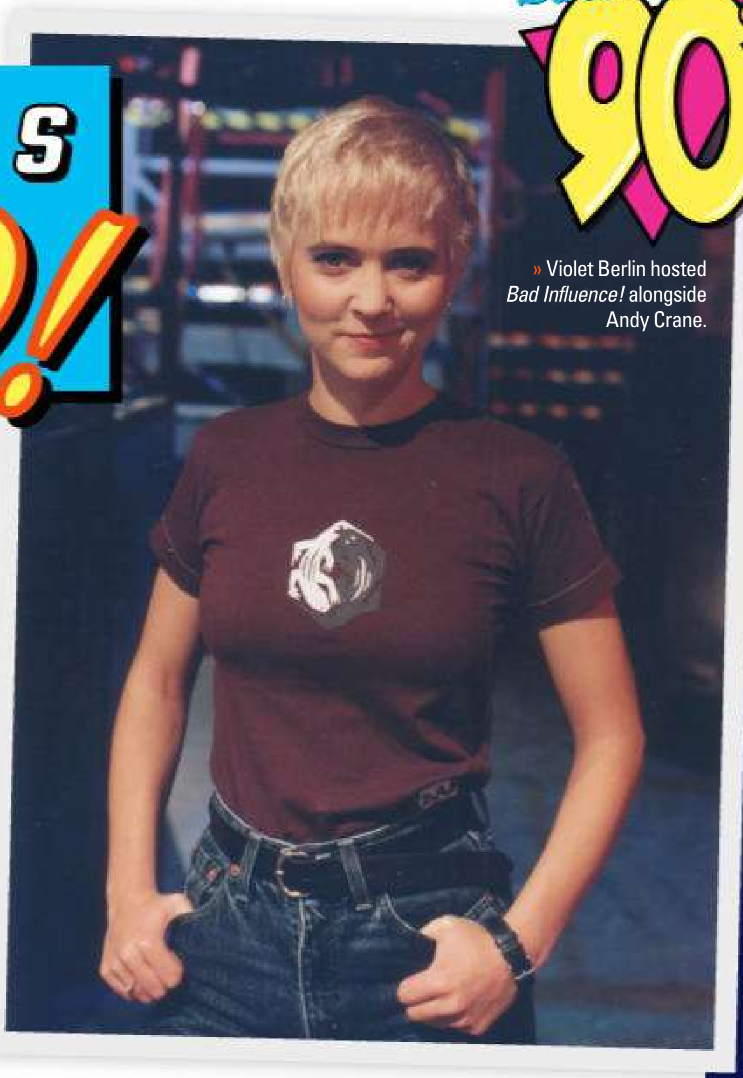
Launch year: 1995

▶ With a circulation upwards of 380,000 by 1999, *Official UK PlayStation Magazine* was one of the best-selling magazines in the country, helped by its phenomenal cover discs. "*OPM* did such a great job with the official licence the other PlayStation magazines were forced to battle for second place," says Paul.

NEW!
The Official PlayStation Magazine
Now you're playing with real power!
Exclusive previews!

THE REVOLUTION IS TELEVISED!

THE NINETIES SAW A GOLDEN AGE OF GAMING TV, AS VIDEOGAMES FOUGHT THEIR WAY INTO THE TV SCHEDULES. YET FEW SUCH SHOWS WOULD REMAIN BY THE DECADE'S END


» Violet Berlin hosted *Bad Influence!* alongside Andy Crane.

"Hiya, welcome to *Bad Influence!*, the only place you'll be able to see moving screenshots of the very latest games." This was Andy Crane's opening line on the first episode of ITV's *Bad Influence!*, and it summed up the novelty of seeing videogames on television. After years of making do with static images in magazines, now gamers could see previews of upcoming releases in motion – and it was revelatory. Particularly so with regards to early 3D games like *Star Fox* and *Super Mario 64*, which looked blocky and flat in magazine screenshots, but were breathtaking when seen in full flow on TV.

Violet Berlin wrote and presented the first regular videogame reviews on UK TV in around 1991, as part of the *Cool Cube* youth magazine show on the short-lived satellite service BSB. "It was full of stars," she says of the show. "We had Take That, Zoe Ball was there with me, Michaela Strachan presented. It was quite a big deal, but no one saw it because it was only satellite."

She recalls that the producers were desperate for content to fill six hours of live TV every week, and one suggested that they should do videogames because his nephews were really into them, so some reps from Nintendo came in to do a demonstration. "I got all this kit to take home," she recalls, "and I became completely and instantly hooked from the moment that I started playing *Castlevania* on the NES."

Bad Influence! followed in 1992 with Violet and Andy as presenters, while *GamesMaster* debuted on Channel 4 earlier in the same year, and *Games World* followed on Sky One in 1993. Suddenly, videogames had arrived on TV in a big way. But whereas *Games World* and *GamesMaster* focused on competitions, *Bad Influence!* was much more keen on showing the games and reporting on the latest technology. "The reason the executive got the idea [for the show] off the ground was because *Bad Influence!* was billed as a *Tomorrow's World* for kids," reveals Violet.

However, videogames weren't well understood by the TV establishment back then. "[They were] still treated in a way that you wouldn't treat other media, if you think of how we talk about films or music," says Violet. And videogame TV shows were baffling to game companies, too. Violet notes that it was a struggle to get permission from publishers to show game footage, and their PR departments tended to favour magazines over TV, even though *Bad Influence!* had an audience of five million. "There were exceptions, but generally it didn't feel like we were that high in the pecking order," she says.

Then, as suddenly as it started, the Golden Age of Gaming TV came to an abrupt end, as one show after another was cancelled in the late Nineties. "There was no games TV, and then there was games TV, and then there was no games TV again," says Violet. "And I feel really lucky that I caught that games TV train in the Nineties: it was absolutely brilliant, and really a very, very unique time." ▶

» Following *Bits*, the presenters' careers went in various different paths.

» Star of *GamesMaster*, Dominik Diamond always had lots to say… about pants.

TV HIGHLIGHTS

THE MEMORABLE SHOWS THAT DEFINED THE NINETIES

GAMESMASTER

Years: 1992–1998
Presenters: Dominik Diamond, Dexter Fletcher, Patrick Moore

▶ *GamesMaster* had competitive events at its heart – partly because it was commissioned by the head of Channel 4's sports programming. Astronomer Patrick Moore dispensed wisdom as the titular GamesMaster, and a parade of rockstar games journalists provided commentary while Dominik Diamond dropped plenty of double entendres.

BAD INFLUENCE!

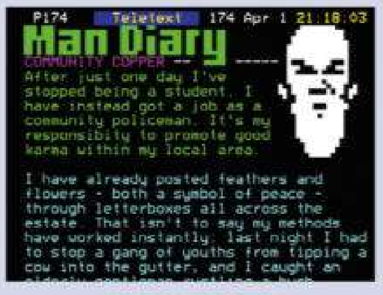
Years: 1992–1996
Presenters: Violet Berlin, Andy Crane

▶ This 20-minute CITV show focused more on showcasing games and the latest innovations rather than the videogame competitions of its contemporaries. Z Wright provided reports from the US on emerging tech like virtual reality, while Nam Rood (Andy Wear) offered gaming tips to the 'slimy furtlers' at home from his shed.

GAMES WORLD

Years: 1993–1999
Presenters: Bob Mills, Andy Collins

▶ Sky One's *Games World* took the form of an elimination contest, with kids competing to win an arcade machine. The first series featured Diane Youdale (Jet from *Gladiators*) as The Games Mistress, but she was later replaced with a section featuring Big Boy Barry (Alex Verrey) and Lesley Luncheonmeat (David Walliams).



P174 Teletext 174 Apr 1 21:18:03
Man Diary
COMMUNITY COPPER
After just one day I've stopped being a student. I have instead got a job as a community policeman. It's my responsibility to promote good karma within my local area.

I have already posted feathers and flowers - both a symbol of peace - through letterboxes all across the estate. That isn't to say my methods have worked instantly, last night I had to stop a gang of youths from tipping a cow into the gutter, and I caught an

DIGITISER

Years: 1993–2003
Presenters: Mr Biffo (Paul Rose), Tim Moore (Mr Hairs)

▶ Strictly speaking, *Digitiser* wasn't a TV show (even though it was on the telly), but it was essential daily viewing for more than a million UK gamers. Its winning blend of reviews, news and irreverent nonsense left a lasting impression on a generation of gamers, who still can't look at a bin without thinking of Mr T.

BITS

Years: 1999–2001
Presenters: Emily Booth, Aleks Krotoski, Emily Newton Dunn

▶ Sneaking in right at the end of the decade, just after most other videogame TV shows had been cancelled, *Bits* offered a more adult, anarchic take on videogaming. Its late-night Channel 4 slot meant it could provide racier content than its pre-watershed predecessors, including an episode on sex, drugs and violence.

HANDHELD HEAVEN!

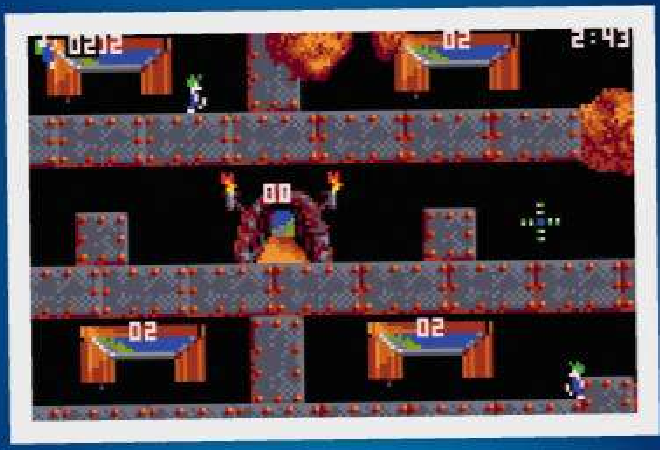
TAKING YOUR FAVOURITE GAMES OUT ON THE ROAD WAS A BIG PART OF PLAYING IN THE NINETIES, AS THE MAJOR MANUFACTURERS TOOK TO MAKING HANDHELD CONSOLES. IT DIDN'T ALWAYS GO WELL FOR THEM, BUT THEIR EFFORTS LEFT AN UNFORGETTABLE LEGACY FOR GAMERS

There are so many times in life when your only option is to sit down and wait. You could be passing time before seeing the doctor, or in the back of a car during a long journey. Whatever the situation, filling these waits suddenly got a lot better as handheld consoles grew in popularity. Of course, handheld videogames weren't an invention of the Nineties, not by a long shot. Whether you want to cite the MB Microvision or the popularity of stand-alone devices like Tiger Electronics' games or Nintendo's Game & Watch series, it's clear that players could enjoy gaming on the go throughout the Eighties. The big difference was that while handheld gaming had been around for a while, handheld consoles as we have come to know them today came of age in the Nineties.

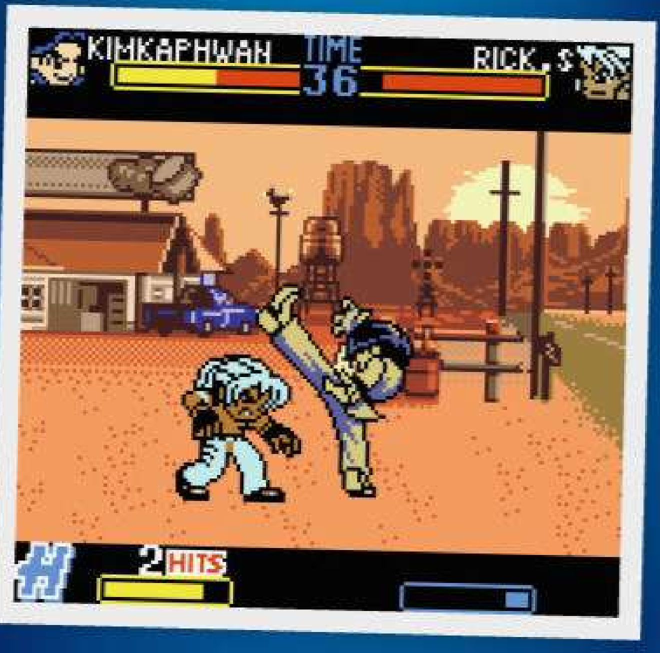
The stage for the handheld boom was set during 1989, when Nintendo introduced its Game Boy. Atari introduced the Lynx later that year, and Sega followed in 1990 with the Game Gear, both of which offered full colour displays. Atari and Sega both tried to offer an experience comparable to that of home consoles, providing full colour backlit LCD displays. Nintendo famously went for a more modest design with a greyscale display, and would ultimately outsell all of its competitors by a wide margin.

All too often, the Game Boy is said to have won out because of its battery life, and while there's some truth to that statement it does a massive disservice to the console's brilliant games. The Game Boy's display was so different to home consoles that it practically demanded bespoke experiences, and Nintendo delivered superbly. If you wanted the full *Zelda* experience, you'd need a Game Boy to pick up *Link's Awakening*. *Mario* fans would naturally want to see the unique stages of *Super Mario Land 2: 6 Golden Coins*, as well as its new villain Wario. *Donkey Kong* was expanded from its original arcade form into an incredible puzzle-platformer. That's before we even get to excellent original titles like *Kirby's Dream Land* and *Mole Mania*, or third party favourites like *Gargoyle's Quest* and *Batman*.

That's not to say that owners of the other systems missed out on great games, mind. While Lynx owners did often have to wait quite a while between games, being able to take excellent versions of *STUN Runner*, *California Game*s and *Klax* out with you was rather lovely. Game Gear owners received plenty of conversions from other Sega platforms, particularly the Master System that its hardware was based on, as well as fantastic exclusive entries in the *Sonic The Hedgehog*, *Shinobi*, and *Shining Force* series. But both companies elected not to follow up on their handheld consoles, and by the mid-Nineties Nintendo was the only purveyor of portable gaming.



» [Lynx] Lynx owners couldn't always be guaranteed the big games, though *Lemmings* was an excellent exception.

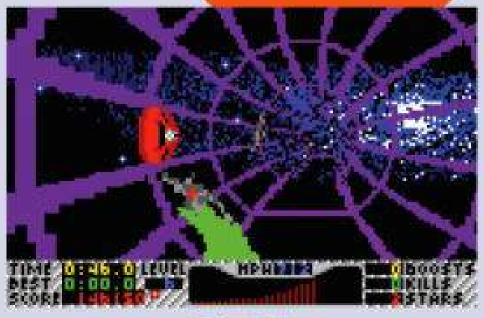


» [Neo Geo Pocket Color] While SNK's games hardly looked bad, it was the massive battery life that distinguished its hardware.

But what really cemented Nintendo as the master of the handheld console was how it kept the Game Boy relevant for over a decade. It had held off both dedicated handheld designs as well as miniaturised home consoles like the PC Engine GT and Sega Nomad, but by early 1996 the old system was looking a little long in the tooth. The arrival of *Pokémon* – a game designed around the system's portability – revived interest in the venerable system almost single-handedly. Plenty of Game Boys were dusted off, and many more were purchased brand-new to experience the

CALLING CARDS

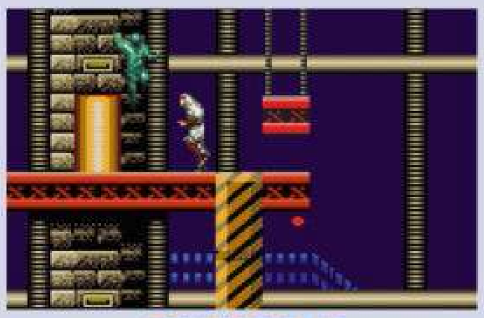
THE SIGNATURE GAMES THAT WERE EMBLEMATIC OF THE DECADE'S BEST HANDHELDS



STUN RUNNER

Lynx

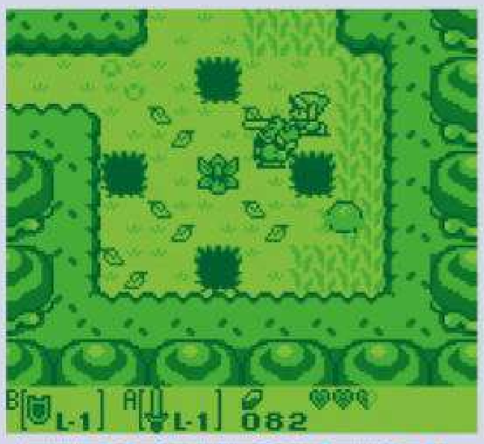
▶ Frankly, it feels like it shouldn't have been possible to authentically replicate this arcade game on a handheld, but the sprite-scaling capabilities of Atari's powerful system gave a convincing enough sense of 3D to pull it off. Shooting through tunnels at an incredible pace feels even more amazing when it's on a system you can put in your bag.



SHINOBI II: THE SILENT FURY

Game Gear

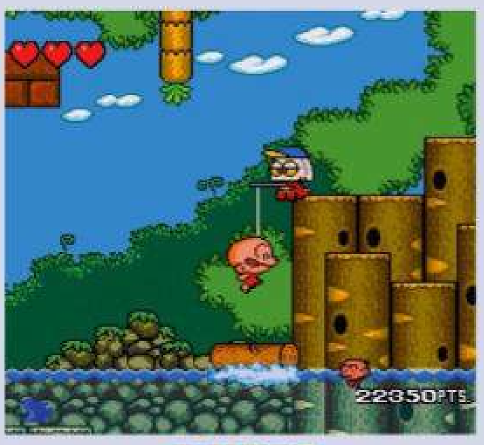
▶ Joe Musashi's first handheld outing was very good, but the sequel was even better as Sega's ninja master sought to rescue his fellow ninjas from their captors. Each one has different abilities, expanding not only your combat possibilities but the areas you can reach. It looks great and the level design is top notch.



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: LINK'S AWAKENING

Game Boy

▶ It's easy to forget that Link's handheld debut was the last game to use the original formula before *Ocarina Of Time* redefined players' expectations of the series, but it used it to perfection. Link's journey to Koholint took him out of his comfort zone, but the action-RPG game design puts fans of the series firmly in theirs.



BONK'S REVENGE

PC Engine GT

▶ While the PC Engine GT can play almost every HuCard, some of them work better than others due to the system's screen. Ideally you want to try something with bold colours and chunky sprites, and platform hero Bonk delivers those graphical qualities in all of his adventures – including this second one, which is the best of the lot.

popular monster battling RPG. Kids around the world would join in the fun as translated versions came out later in the decade – and many of them would do it on the Game Boy Color, introduced in 1998 as the first major upgrade to the near decade-old platform.

That's what made handheld consoles so different from the rest of the gaming scene at the time. Companies weren't preoccupied with making more powerful systems, but more efficient ones. The kind of games you could play on a Game Boy Color or Neo Geo Pocket Color weren't tremendously different to those you could have played on a Lynx – but that was the beauty of it. Handheld consoles weren't just a way to keep the kids quiet – as the last bastion of 2D gaming, they were a haven for games as they used to be, and plenty of coding veterans kept themselves busy making portable games. From returning favourites like *R-Type DX* and *Paperboy* to downscaled interpretations of contemporary classics like *Tomb Raider*, the handhelds of the Nineties had a game to offer for just about any fan of old-school design – and that remains true today. ▶

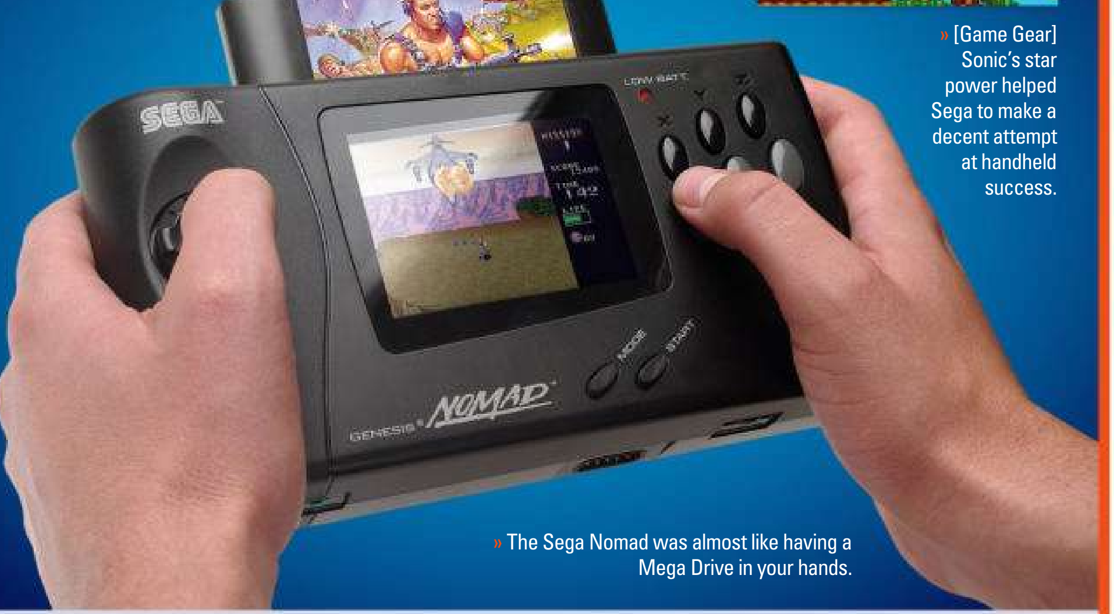
366KM
TIME 54

» [Game Gear] Being able to pass a long car journey with *Out Run*'s short car journeys was good fun.

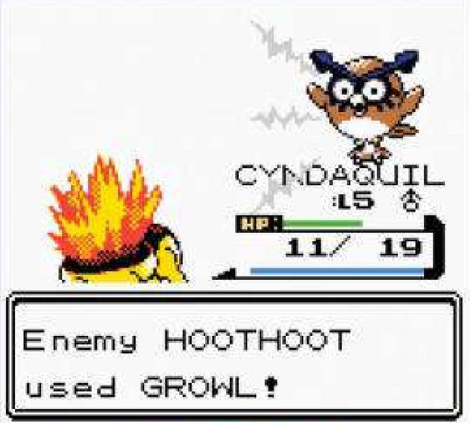
STAGE 1-B WEAPON N-1
SCORE 30530 ♟X3

» [Game Boy] Plenty of third party publishers helped the Game Boy to become a success with games like *Batman*.

» [Game Gear] Sonic's star power helped Sega to make a decent attempt at handheld success.



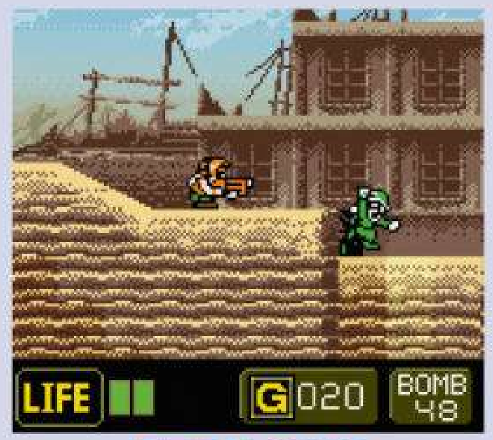
» The Sega Nomad was almost like having a Mega Drive in your hands.



POKÉMON GOLD/SILVER

Game Boy Color

▶ Sneaking out in Japan just before the end of the decade, the second generation of *Pokémon* games is amazing for just how much was squeezed into a single cartridge. Over 250 monsters, an enormous world map and new features make them enormous RPGs – and if you hate colour, they'll even run on an original Game Boy.



METAL SLUG: 2ND MISSION

Neo Geo Pocket Color

▶ SNK's classic run-and-gun formula was hardly broken, but some subtle adjustments for portable play made it a true handheld classic. With brand-new level layouts and the frustration-reducing addition of health restoring items, as well as the ability to track which prisoners you've rescued, the game is a unique experience.

RETRO FUTURISM

ELLIOT COLL MODS AND REPAIRS NINETIES HANDHELDS ON THE RETRO FUTURE YOUTUBE CHANNEL, AND HERE HE EXPLAINS WHY HE'S SO FASCINATED WITH THEM

How did you become interested in retro handheld consoles?

In 2009 I got an issue of the *Official Nintendo Magazine*, and at the back was this double page spread which had retro handheld consoles. My mum used to buy me this every month, and this one made me absolutely obsessed with all the retro consoles. So for my birthday that year, a friend of mine gave me his dad's Game Boy Color. It was pretty much then that I started collecting original Game Boys and stuff.

What do you find appealing about the older handhelds?

I think the beautiful thing about these devices is that the games are so simple, the soundtracks are often really good. I think we now have access to fantastic mods that make the experience less of a gimmick and more of a well-rounded gaming experience that people are fully immersed into and enjoy.

With other options out there, how do you feel about playing these games on original hardware?

You're not really playing these things now to be blown away by the actual experience of the specifications of the original hardware. It's solely now for living through nostalgia, or once you modify an original handheld, getting to actually fully experience the games as they were meant to be experienced, without any limitations. Now, you're not thinking "Oh, today's a crap day to play my PlayStation 5, there's not enough sun," whereas back then there were certain things to take into consideration, like not having backlights.

What would you consider to be some of the essential mods for older systems?

The number one thing is obviously the screen. It's now a solderless process, which it wasn't before, you can now even buy shells on eBay – basically you buy the components and you just fit them together, all you need is a screwdriver. You used to have to cut out the shell and in some cases you used to have to CNC the shell to get a perfectly accurate cut. Within a year it went from being an incredibly difficult thing, and a very expensive thing to do, to now anyone can do it with £100 and come out with a stunning Game Boy at the end of it. So screen is the number one thing. To make it custom, people like changing the shells and the buttons – there's so much variation now that there wasn't before, you can get just about any colour under the sun, and any shade of colour.

What are some of your favourite games for Nineties handhelds?

For the original Game Boy, *Link's Awakening*. The feeling of completing that game was unbelievable, I literally grabbed my mum and pulled her into the room to see the ending screen. I think there's something so amazing about the ocarina playing the music alongside the other orchestra instruments. I like the original Game Gear *Sonic The Hedgehog*, fantastic game. Neo Geo Pocket, I like *The King Of Fighters*, that's a great game. If I'm honest, *Tetris* is always the game that's loaded into a Game Boy because it's just a pick up and play, zero effort game. *Mole Mania* I've been playing recently, a little hidden gem for the Game Boy, and I've just got a legitimate copy of *Trip World* for the Game Boy as well.

» Here we have a small selection of the many handhelds that Elliot has modded on his channel.

RISE OF THE PC!

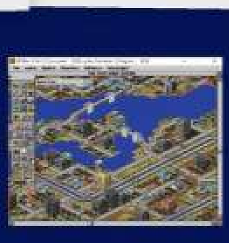
INNOVATIVE GAMES, BLEEDING EDGE TECHNOLOGY AND NEW WAYS TO PLAY WITH OR AGAINST OTHER PLAYERS DEFINED WHAT IT MEANT TO BE A PC GAMER IN THE NINETIES, BUT WHAT WAS IT THAT MADE PERSONAL COMPUTERS – AND OF COURSE WINDOWS – THE LEADING PLATFORM?

» [PC] Every PC gamer of the decade remembers their first Resonance Cascade. This screenshot doesn't even need a name: you know it.

Whichever way you look at it, the Nineties was rife with technological advances for the games industry as a whole, and while some might point to the PlayStation, 3D graphics in general or the burgeoning internet as some of the biggest leaps, the PC was at the forefront of this sudden shift in opportunities for gaming. The start of the decade looked completely different by the end, with well-known names like CPC, Spectrum and Amstrad seeing relative success at the turn of the decade only to be cast aside in favour of the behemoth that was Windows and PC gaming. "The PC was definitely not the hardware platform of choice for game makers or players," explains Louis Castle, one of the founders of Westwood Studios and a developer that defined a large part of PC gaming in the Nineties. "As the PC became the dominant platform for home computing, game makers could not ignore the audience size."

This was the key reason that PC gaming began to become so popular early on in the Nineties, because where Atari and Sinclair and the like all focused solely on gaming, Microsoft instead targeted a more well-rounded, functional and capable home computer. As those numbers grew, so too did developer interest in the platform and there were some benefits that came with it. "Windows owes a good deal of gaming platform success to Chris Hecker who created the original WinG libraries, which allowed games to access some of the hardware acceleration that was built into PCs to make Windows be more performant," says Louis. "Direct Draw and the whole DirectX Suite of APIs followed, which allowed PC gaming to happen." With these APIs, a lot of the development heavy lifting could be handled natively on PC that meant developing on PC – and its hodge-podge of potential hardware – didn't require so much effort spent on compatibility.

Admittedly there were other areas that needed work for the PC platform to take off, so when IBM released its video graphics array (VGA) at the turn of the decade, supporting 256 colours rather than the previous 16 colours, the PC could really start being taken seriously. "Until then, PC couldn't really compete on a graphics level," says David Brevik, the man behind one of the decade's biggest releases: *Diablo*. "It just wasn't considered to be much of a platform until that point. But it wasn't long after this, with the advent of the very first 3D cards that came out, and that was right around the time of *Quake*. You had the 3dfx cards that could do 3D, polygonal rendering." This new hardware opened up great potential for the PC platform, but David points instead to the algorithms that could better utilise these new 3D cards as the most important aspect that turned PC gaming into the leading platform for visual fidelity. "Especially things like the BSP tree from John Carmack," adds David, "and being able to draw faked 3D things with *Doom* and true 3D polygons in *Quake* on a high frame rate on a computer … Those kinds of things were the biggest influences on PC gaming in the Nineties."



» [PC] *SimCity 2000* was easily one of the biggest releases of the decade, offering the same sort of sequel improvements as *Civ II* did for *Civilization*.

» [PC] Everyone was talking about *Doom*, and the fact that it was available as shareware meant that interest in PC gaming exploded almost immediately.

» [PC] Blizzard's work on *StarCraft* and building it with multiplayer in mind kept PC gamers hooked, and has built a diehard esports community around it.

And on top of all this was this new-fangled 'internet' thingy coming into prominence, which didn't just enable PCs to send emails and browse the web, but even play games with other players in real-time. *Neverwinter Nights* (1991) was the first online RPG that used graphics, however primitive they may have been, to allow players to connect to others within the game. It was monumental for gaming, and a concept that was used further and further until the seminal release of the first 'true' MMO, *EverQuest*, in 1999. "A wave of consumers now had access to the internet, which transformed the way multiplayer games could operate," says Louis. "Prior to Windows 95, getting any game to work on the internet was a challenge. Our game *Monopoly* used the Windows 95 internet APIs to have a multiplayer launch event in Japan, the US and Europe." It's hard to imagine if the likes of *Quake*, *Diablo*, *StarCraft* and the RTS genre in general would have had the massive appeal they did if it wasn't for the opportunities that the internet presented to PC gamers – and in that sense it was likely the key reason for the Nineties being seen as the Golden Age of PC gaming. "Being able to do multiplayer gaming was a huge factor and the big difference maker for PCs," adds David, "and consoles were way behind on that." ✱

» [PC] *Doom* may well have created the modern-day FPS, but it was the true 3D of *Quake* that dominated the Nineties.

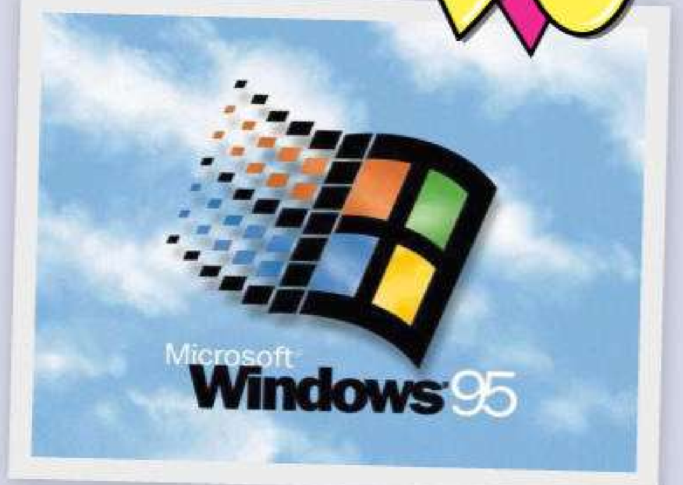
I GOT 95 PROBLEMS, BUT WINDOWS AIN'T ONE

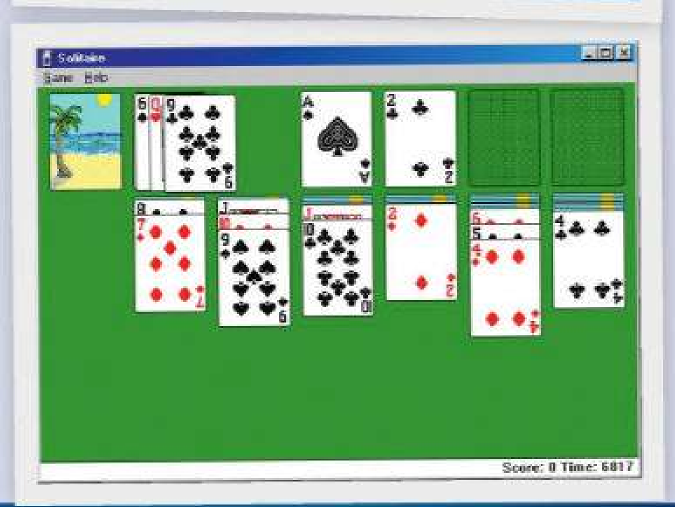
HOW MICROSOFT'S WINDOWS 95 CHANGED THE FACE OF PC GAMING

We don't often talk about operating systems in these pages, less so have we ever described one as 'iconic'. But there's something about Windows 95 that rattles those nostalgia bones: whether it's the familiar logo and startup sounds, that horrible teal desktop background, or just all those hours spent on *Minesweeper*: Win 95 was the starting point for a generation of people just entering the digital age.

But it did a lot for gaming, too. While Microsoft was still pushing on the business nature of its software, there were still some dedicated gamers within the company that saw it necessary to improve the platform for game developers and users. This took the form of DirectX, and while this API wasn't initially anything to dethrone OpenGL (which *Quake* ran on), it would receive continued support from Microsoft throughout the lifespan of Windows 95 to such a point that it is now a fairly essential part of any PC gamer's repertoire of must-download *things* when starting on a new rig.

As a tangent to this was DirectPlay, the communications-based branch DirectX. This naturally was crucial to PC gaming at the time, since it meant no longer was it necessary to lug your machine around to a mate's house for a weekend LAN party, but instead you could connect to other players via the internet. DirectPlay was a key part of easy connectivity, and that's saying nothing of how Win 95 had completely removed the hassle of connecting to the internet in the first place.





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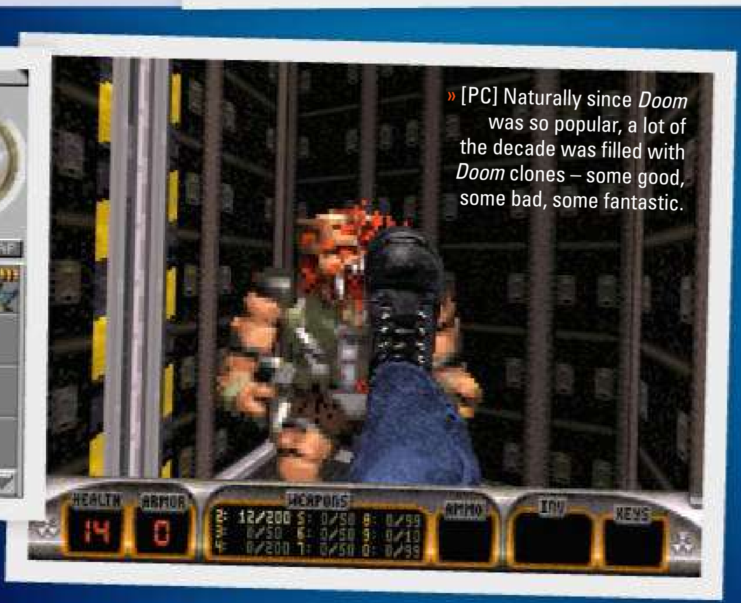
» [PC] Impressions Games had a very successful run of city-building games all featuring the same core mechanics. *Caesar III* was the most notable, but other games also focused on Greece and Egypt.

OPTIONS
1200
SIDEBAR
REPAIR SELL MAP



» [PC] Naturally since *Doom* was so popular, a lot of the decade was filled with *Doom* clones – some good, some bad, some fantastic.

PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES

THE BIG-NAME 3D CARDS THAT POWERED THE NINETIES ON PC

3DFX VOODOO GRAPHICS PCI

RELEASED: 1996

▶ There was a time when 3dfx was the one to beat when it came to PC 3D cards, and the name 'Voodoo' is still spoken with reverence. This was the first 3D card that 3dfx released and though it would release additional models throughout the decade, this was a mainstay for many PC gamers. John Carmack once called this card "the benchmark against which everything else is measured". Lofty praise indeed.

NVIDIA RIVA 128

RELEASED: 1997

▶ Nvidia has always been a big player in the PC graphics business, but in the Nineties it was often playing second fiddle to 3dfx. The RIVA 128 was the company's attempt at throwing big numbers at the problem, though there were other downsides that held it back. However, it was the first graphics card to include 3D acceleration on the board, and in the era of *Quake* deathmatches, any assistance in pumping out 3D graphics was a big seller.

3DFX VOODOO2

RELEASED: 1998

▶ Considered to be a great deal better than anything available at the time, the successor to the popular Voodoo had a number of competitors to beat and did so ably. Primarily this was due to the high frame rates it was capable of, a matter that on paper the riva128 should've been able to beat but rarely could. The Voodoo2 was also the first graphics card to introduce SLI, spawning that smug breed of gamer that always has to tell you when they have two GPUs installed in their PC.

NVIDIA GEFORCE 256

RELEASED: 1999

▶ Though it was expensive, this was capable of improving frame rates for games at the time by up to 50%. It began the technical journey towards the practice of having the 3D card take the processing work from the CPU, which is now commonplace. Delays to 3dfx's Voodoo 4 was enough to give the GeForce 256 an advantage in the volatile early days of the GPU market, and the rest became history… 3dfx went bankrupt, and Nvidia bought it up.

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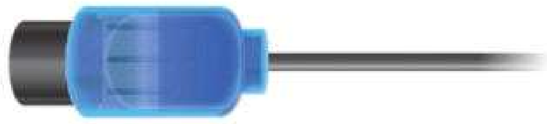

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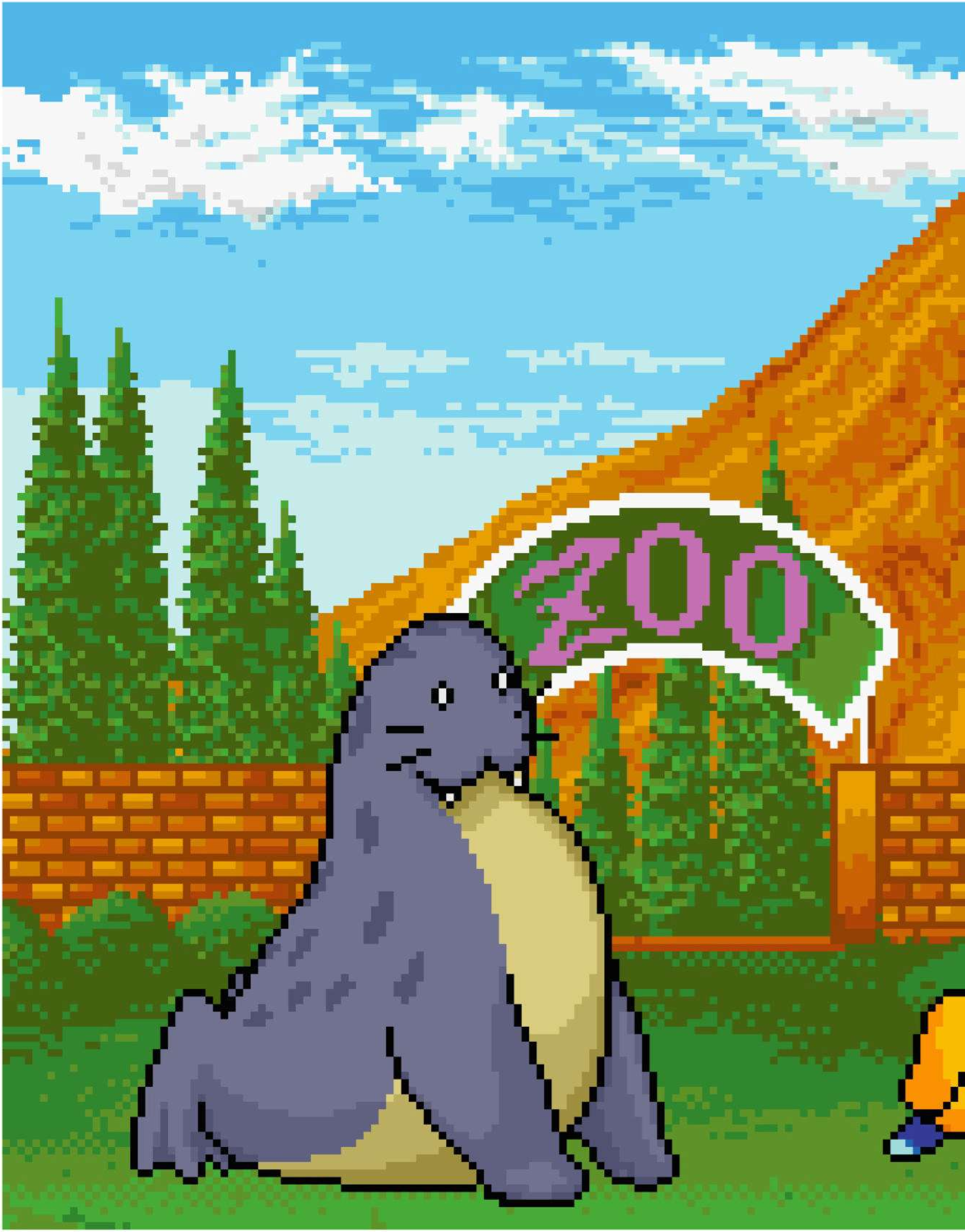

ZOO

The New Zealand Story

AND YOU THOUGHT BUBBLE BOBBLE WAS CUTE…

» ARCADE » 1988 » TAITO

I've always loved birds, so any game that features a bird protagonist is going to be my sort of game. This holds true for games with dinosaurs in as well, because they're essentially retro birds.

While I was initially attracted to *The New Zealand Story* because it features a cute (and completely unrealistic looking) kiwi called Tiki, I stuck with Taito's game, because it was just so much fun to play. The Japanese developer was the king of cute during this period and for me, *The New Zealand Story* was easily the cutest game it had made at that point. I mean, just look at this opening sequence where an evil leopard seal has kidnapped all of Tiki's mates. You can't help but say "aww", even though you inevitably know that in the end, you'll eventually have to kill it.

That cuteness pervades Taito's game, from its sickeningly sweet enemies to its oversized anthropomorphic bosses and cheerful backgrounds. And then of course there's that maddeningly catchy theme tune that becomes impossible to listen to without humming along. If rainbow factories existed and there was ever an explosion in one, *The New Zealand Story* would have no doubt have been discovered after sifting through the colourful wreckage.

While it might be more colourful than a Care Bear Stare, there was a brutal difficulty to *The New Zealand Story*, which belied its cheerful exterior. I'm sure there's a YouTube video of someone single-crediting the game, but it's a feat that will be forever beyond my abilities. In fact, now I think about it, despite owning numerous versions of the game over the years, from the Amstrad CPC to Sega's Mega Drive (why did I sell that particular version?), I don't think I've ever completed Taito's game. I've got versions of the arcade game on a couple of compilations I own so maybe 2021 is the year I finally complete it? Just think. Rather than simply saying "aww", I can finish it with an "aww, yeah!" ✱

THE MAKING OF

BMX Simulator

THE DARLING BROTHERS WERE ARGUABLY RIDING THEIR LUCK WHEN THEY SOUGHT TO REPLICATE THE THRILL OF BMX RACING ON HOME COMPUTERS BUT IT BECAME A HUGE HIT AND HERALDED THE START OF CODEMASTERS' LONG AND SUCCESSFUL JOURNEY

WORDS BY DAVID CROOKES

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

CHILLER
SYSTEM: C64, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1985

MICRO MACHINES
SYSTEM: NES, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1991

COLIN MCRAE RALLY (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PS1, PC, GBC
YEAR: 1998

Having banged out budget games for Mastertronic for a few years, Richard and David Darling pulled on the brakes. They took a few months out and looked to ride on their development success by creating the publisher Codemasters in 1986. They also quickly figured that the best way to get things moving again would be to journey back to their first successful game.

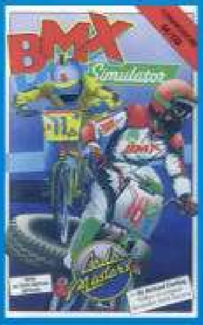
In 1984, the brothers had developed *BMX Racers* on the Commodore 64 – a game that was, in many respects, the starting point for endless runners. It had players cycling through a series of short, top-down courses avoiding obstacles until they eventually crashed but, while simple, it bunny-hopped on the huge craze for BMX bikes and quickly became Mastertronic's biggest-selling original game.

"BMX was really popular – all the kids had BMX bikes, they'd go to the BMX parks and they'd race and do jumps and tricks," says David, part-explaining why the game sold 345,423 copies. "We were quite interested in BMX generally and we knew the theme worked from being at Mastertronic. In fact, we'd learned from our time at Mastertronic that games based on real-world themes tended to perform best so when we started Codemasters we wanted to make these kinds of games."

Rather than simply replicate *BMX Racers*, the Darlings looked to go further. "We wanted to develop more of an overhead racing game – more of a simulation and something more realistic," he says. While, in truth, that was always going to be difficult on an 8-bit machine, the brothers nevertheless popped themselves back into the saddle, with Richard designing and coding what would become *BMX Simulator*.

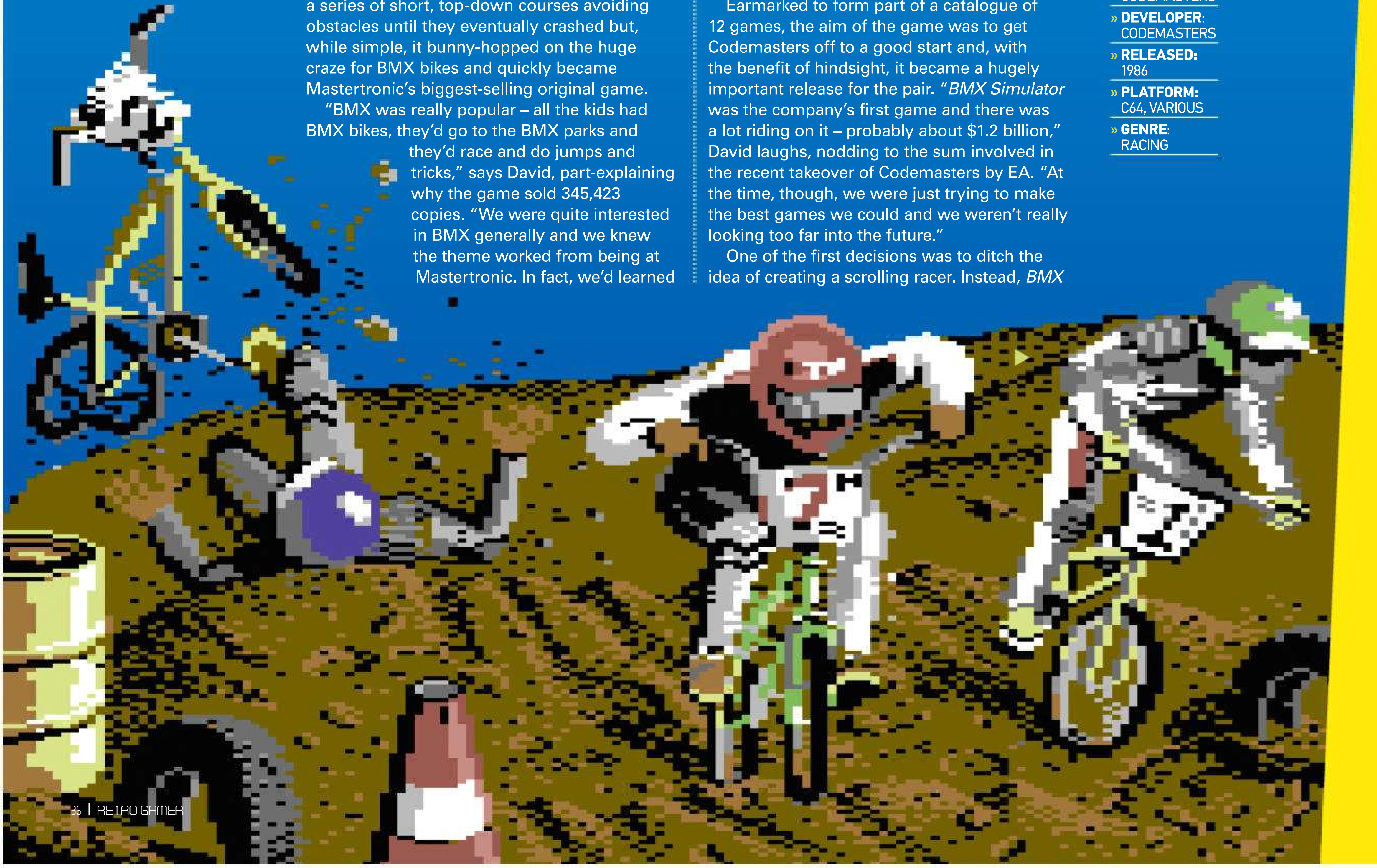
Earmarked to form part of a catalogue of 12 games, the aim of the game was to get Codemasters off to a good start and, with the benefit of hindsight, it became a hugely important release for the pair. "*BMX Simulator* was the company's first game and there was a lot riding on it – probably about $1.2 billion," David laughs, nodding to the sum involved in the recent takeover of Codemasters by EA. "At the time, though, we were just trying to make the best games we could and we weren't really looking too far into the future."

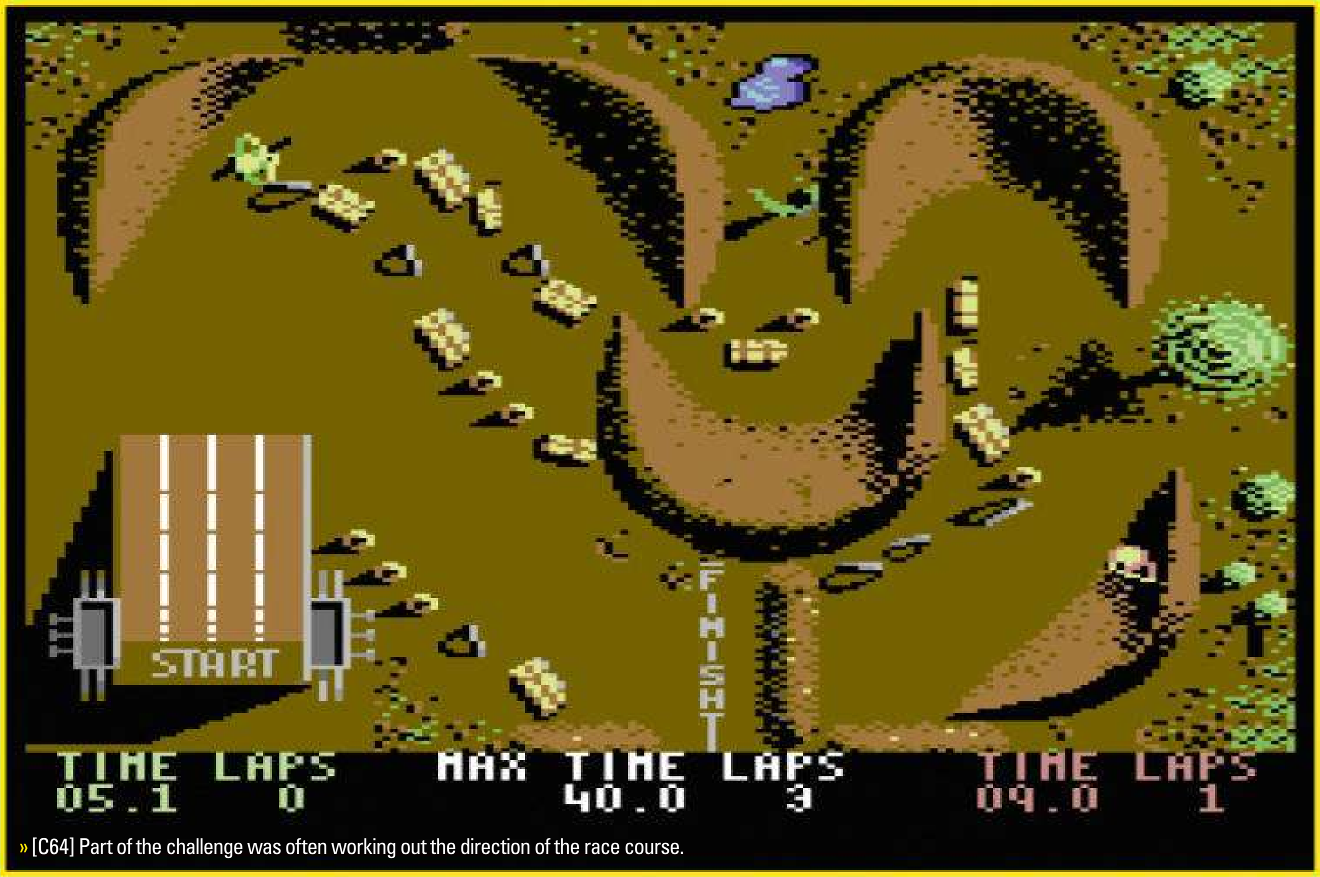
One of the first decisions was to ditch the idea of creating a scrolling racer. Instead, *BMX*



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** CODEMASTERS
» **DEVELOPER:** CODEMASTERS
» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **PLATFORM:** C64, VARIOUS
» **GENRE:** RACING





» [C64] Part of the challenge was often working out the direction of the race course.

> “BMX SIMULATOR WAS THE COMPANY’S FIRST GAME AND THERE WAS A LOT RIDING ON IT”
> **DAVID DARLING**

Simulator would become a top-down racing game along the lines of Atari’s *Super Sprint* – a game that had been released in April 1986 as a successor to *Gran Trak 10*. The Darlings had seen this game – Codemasters, after all, was not launched until October that year. But *BMX Simulator* was never designed to be a rip-off of that instant classic.

“We weren’t particularly inspired by *Super Sprint*,” counters David. “We were more inspired by the success of *BMX Racers* and wanting to create a new, original BMX racing game. That said, *Super Sprint* proved that you could make top-down racing games work from a game mechanics point of view and I’m sure we would have noticed that at the time.”

David worked primarily in the background during the development of the game, helping Richard with any questions but largely being content to leave his sibling to it. The brothers, however, were very much agreed that greater realism was needed to back up the word ‘Simulator’ in the title (“at least within the limitations of the Commodore 64,” David says).

“The aim was to produce something that was fun in an arcadey way but the reason why we ended up calling it *BMX Simulator* is because we sought to have a proper 3D simulated environment where there was gravity and forces like friction which worked as you went around the berms, just like in real life,” David continues. This manifested itself over a series of seven mud tracks strewn with obstacles such as ramps and tyres that became progressively more tricky to navigate.

Since the courses were single-screen affairs, the obstacles were pretty small. So too were the players’ bikes. Yet this combination made for a more intricate game, allowing gamers to easily see what was ahead of them, note their rival’s position and negotiate the splashes, turns and bumps with a greater level of finesse.

By timing those berms right, you’d get an extra, slight but satisfying burst of speed which could ease players through to the next course. Ride over the rough and you’d slow down. The trick was to learn the effects of the ground and this would mean experienced players would always have an advantage. It felt like a game of skill but it was also mightily frustrating at times.

Part of this was due to a set of unforgiving controls and the fact that, after crashing, a player would end up facing the wrong way which could often lead to another collision. A decision to add a timer also meant the races were not merely a case of beating the opponent. A player had to complete the laps within a given time to qualify for the next track and, even when competing against another human, the pressure was on at least one of the two players to achieve this.

Even so, it remained fun and that’s because Richard designed the game primarily to be played with a friend. “The game worked because it wasn’t really intended to be played alone,” affirms David. “I felt strongly about the multiplayer at the time and I was strongly pushing that aspect of it.”

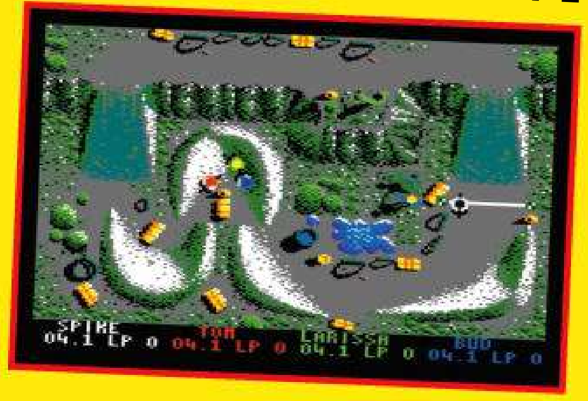
Nevertheless, it was deemed important to have a computer ▶

©Kwalee

» David Darling cofounded Codemasters, but now runs Kwalee, which has recently moved into console gaming.

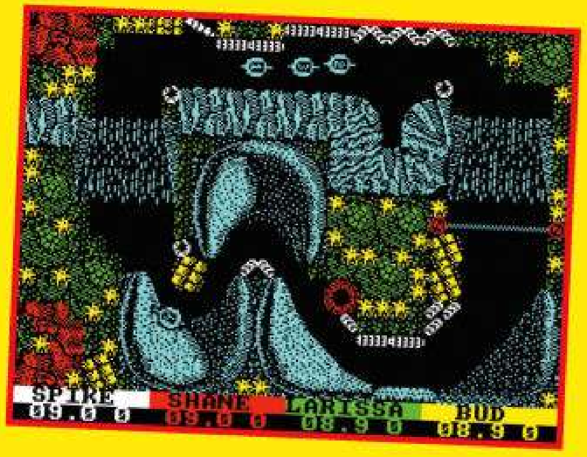
BMX forever

SOME WHEELIE GOOD SEQUELS AND SPIN-OFFS



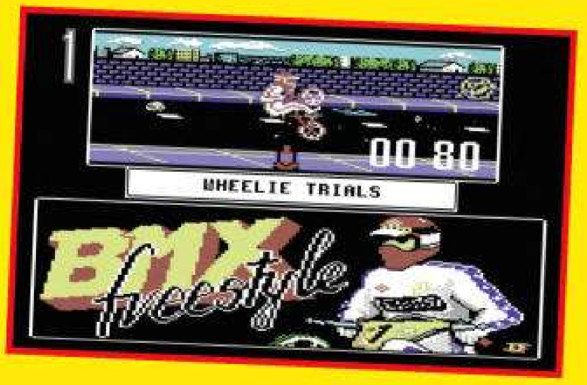
PROFESSIONAL BMX SIMULATOR

Codemasters’ follow-up was sold on its Plus label for £4.99, giving gamers a free poster and sticker while popping two cassettes into the case. This time, up to four players could compete across fifteen courses, customising their bikes to suit the circuits. As well as dirt biking, gamers could take part in quarry and desert racing.



BMX SIMULATOR 2

A year later, *Professional BMX Simulator* was re-released at a lower price, dropping the extra tape, removing desert racing and giving the game a new name. It remained an 8-bit only offering, with players who didn’t find the original hard enough relishing the increased challenge, thanks to the continued addition of the expert mode.

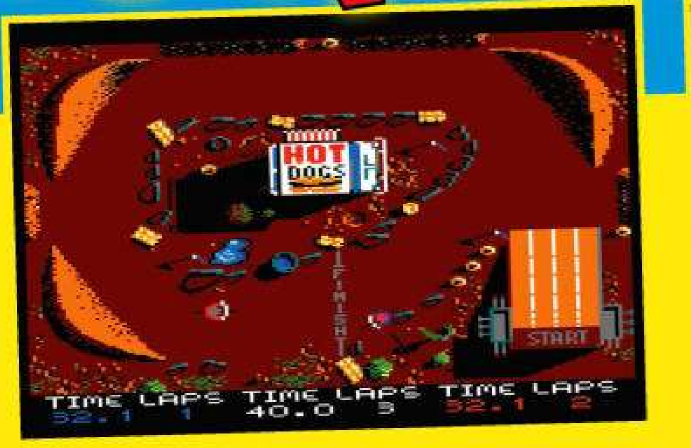


BMX FREESTYLE

Given the impressive sales of *BMX Simulator*, the Codies were always going to wheel out another offering. With *BMX Freestyle*, players had to focus on specific events such as ramp jumps, half pipes and a wheelies trial. It also moved away from the top-down view with some – tricky – side-on action.

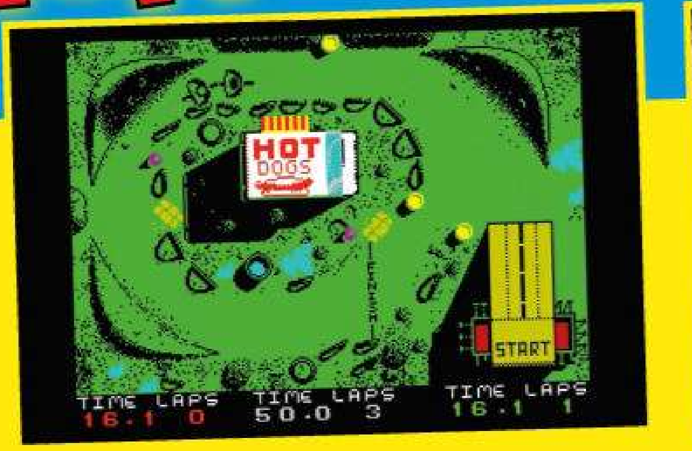
CONVERSION Capers

BMX SIMULATOR RODE ON TO MANY PLATFORMS



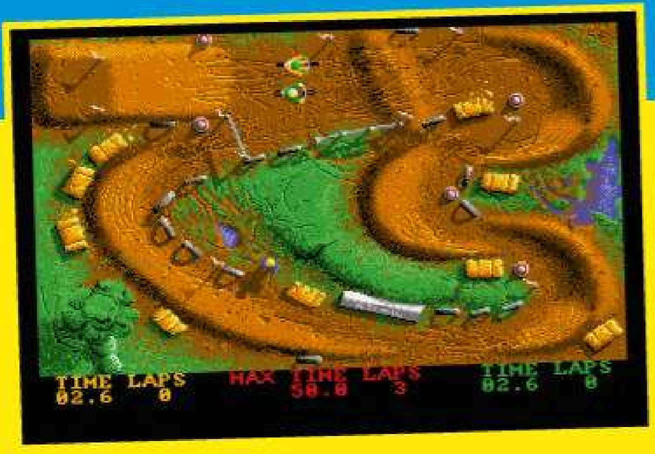
AMSTRAD CPC

■ Fast, fluid (yet just as frustrating as other versions), Tim Miller's Amstrad port made good use of the CPC's 16-colour mode to create a beautifully detailed set of seven courses. Whizzing around the tracks felt easier thanks to improved handling and the title screen audio was music to the ears.



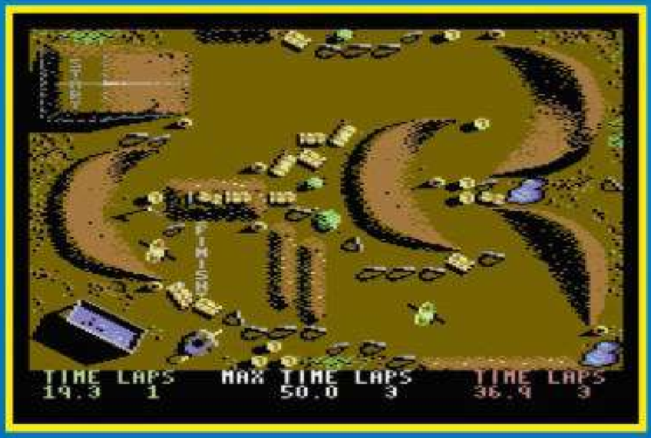
ZX SPECTRUM

■ Faced with a limited palette, graphics artist James Wilson opted for a green background in the Speccy version, giving the appearance the bikers were riding on grass. It meant the obstacles and riders were depicted as black outlines, but re-definable controls and the underlying simplicity of the game ensured it remained good fun.

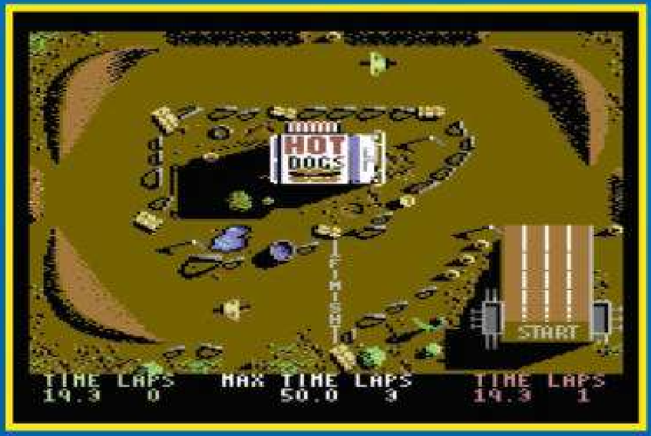


AMIGA

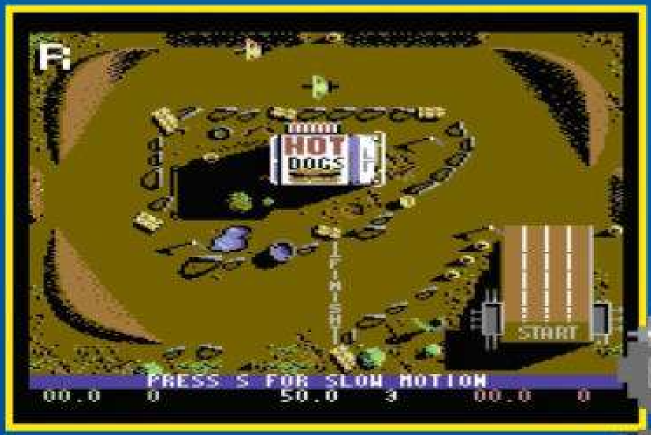
■ Richard and David Darling admitted *BMX Simulator* did not make the most of the technology available to them on Commodore's 16-bit computer. As such, this port failed to add any extra features and the graphics, while better than any 8-bit version, fell far short of what would have been expected on the machine.



» [C64] Obstacles not only cause you to fall but they can also become a barrier to getting back into the race.



» [C64] Only if one of the human players finished their laps before the time ran out would you progress to the next track.



» [C64] Each race could be played back and if you tapped S, then you could slow it down for dramatic effect.

▶ opponent in case the player did want to enjoy the game on their own. For this, a rudimentary system was created in which the developer played as the computer-controlled bike, recorded the keypresses and used them as the basis for the 'AI' opponent.

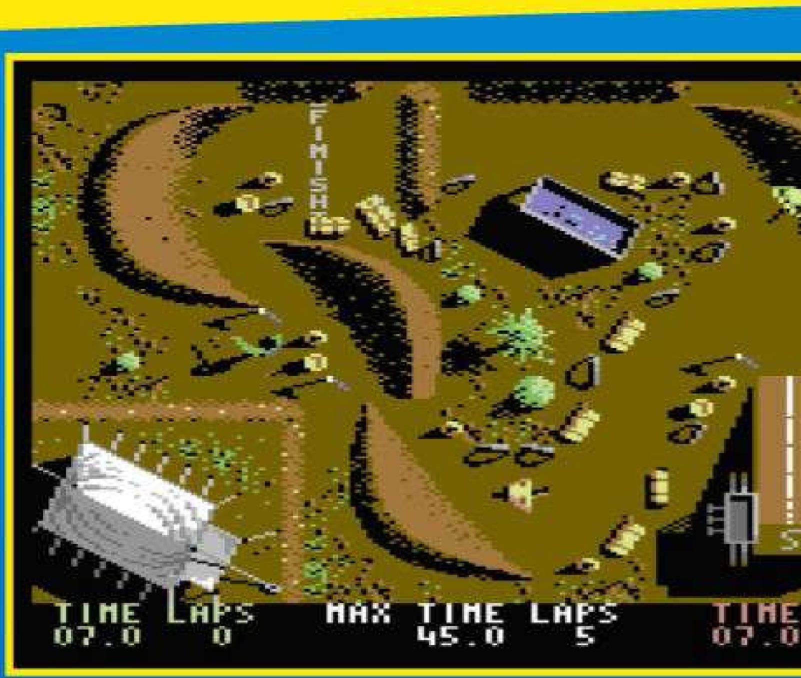
A similar system of recording keypresses was also used to replay a race once it had been completed, ensuring the heart-pounding moments or close finishes could be relived. In this case, the human player's keypresses would be recorded. Gamers were then allowed to hold down S to slow the action replay down for extra drama.

All of this was laid down within three months, with the work being carried out at Codemasters' first HQ at the Beaumont Business Centre in Banbury. "It was quite a tiny space but there was a reception area and Richard and I each had an office," says David. Richard worked on the game in his own office and he'd often be accompanied by James Wilson who produced the graphics.

"James was one of our best friends and we used to go to school with him," David says of the talent behind the game's visuals. "He'd become Codemasters' first artist and part of the core team but, shortly after working on *BMX Simulator,* he sadly died in an accident aged just 20, making the game one of the last he worked on."

Adding to the drive for realism were in-game sounds that sought to mimic both the tyres on the ground and any (inevitable) crashes. In truth, they sounded anything but real but there was at least a cool, ear-friendly music track during the intro sequences, with all of the audio coming courtesy of the talented musician, David Whittaker.

David had become interested in computing around 1981 and he'd cut his teeth on the VIC-20, writing games in machine code and saving the results out to tape. He found he was able to earn a decent living creating music and FX for games even though he had no formal training as a composer. He'd simply tinker with a keyboard to produce something which he felt sounded good and he'd generally spend around a day on a game's audio.

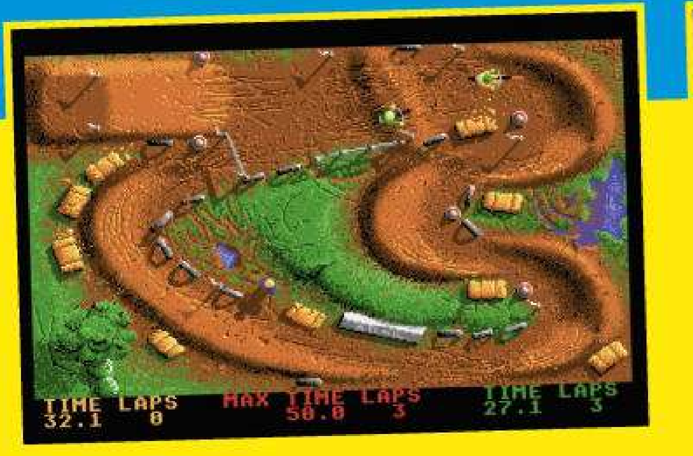


» [C64] Getting this far – course seven – would require a lot of patience, unless you can find a cheat…

"David was a contractor and we'd discuss the game with him, describing the music we wanted and the kind of sounds effects we wanted," says David. "We'd tell him how much memory we had available and the technical requirements and he'd go off and work his magic."

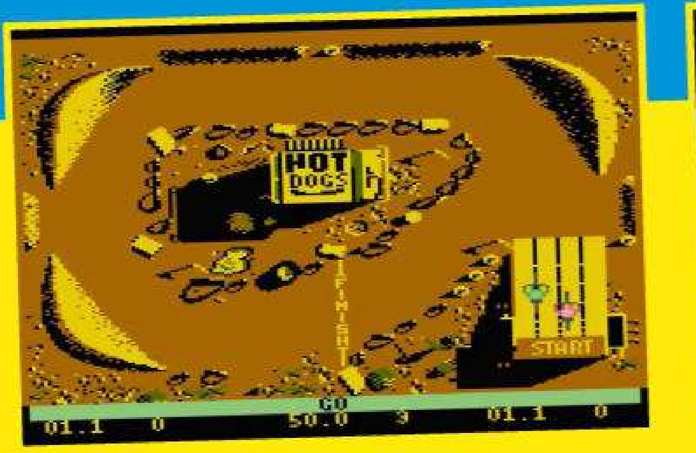
Before long, the Commodore 64 version was near completion and the Darlings decided that the game was good enough to be ported to other platforms. This, they surmised, would generate extra cash and so they hired Tim Miller to carry out a conversion to the ZX Spectrum.

"We'd realised it was a great game and so we wanted to see it on other machines," David says. "Tim made a great version for the Spectrum which didn't look quite as good but it played really well." The game was also ported to MSX and the Amstrad CPC with 16-bit versions on the



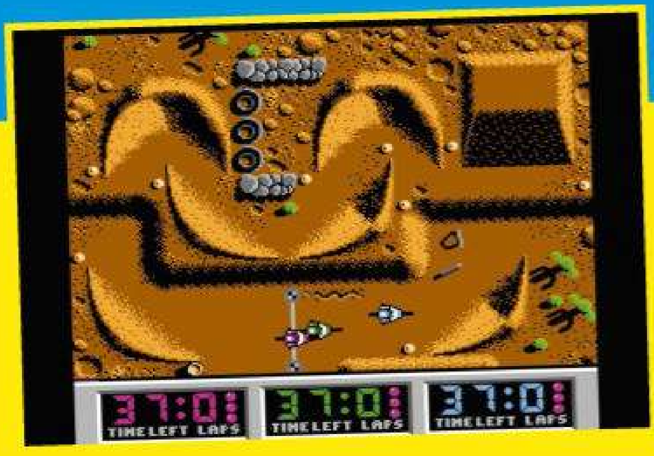
ATARI ST

A pleasant title tune aside, the Atari ST version – like the one for the Amiga – left gamers with a feeling that Codemasters could have gone the extra distance. Prone to over-steer, accidents were near as damn unavoidable and, at a jaw-dropping price of £14.99, it really ought to have been better.



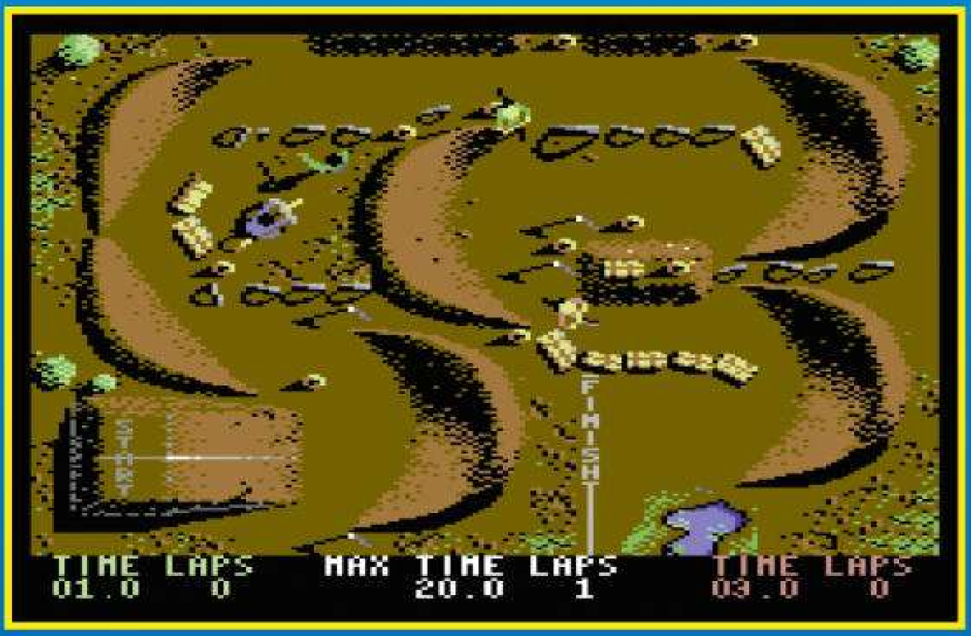
ATARI XL/XE

Adrian Sheppard ported the Atari 8-bit version which bore all the hallmarks of the original albeit with a muddy looking brown course. As always, the computer rider would tend to move with far greater fluidity than any player would really hope to match. The title music had a nice beat, though.

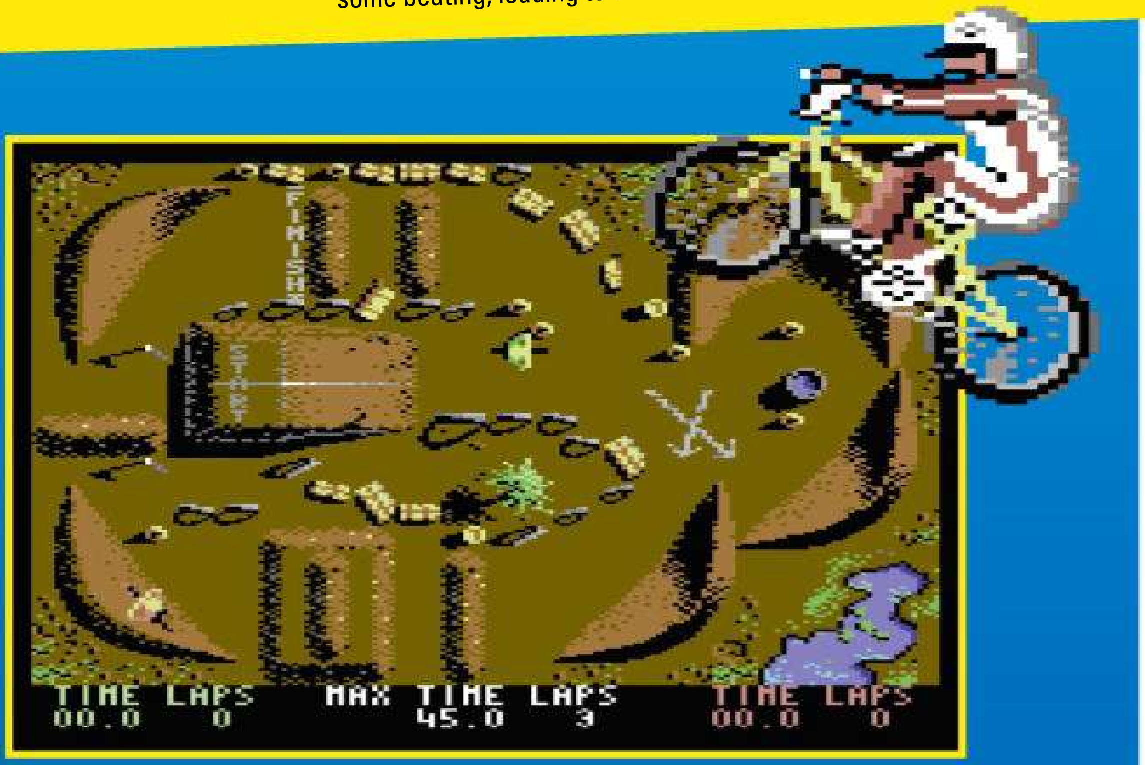


NES

Released as part of the *Quattro Sports* compilation, this enhanced version of *BMX Simulator* went beyond the original by providing fifteen tracks and letting three players compete against each other. The graphics were polished but the difficulty level meant the corners took some beating, leading to those all-too familiar crashes.



» [C64] Tracks with lots of berms were a great way of showing off your skill.



» [C64] A nice touch in the third course, where directional markings on the ground need to be adhered to.

Amiga and Atari ST following. The brothers felt they had a winner on their hands.

As well as promoting the game by sending copies to the computer magazines of the day, Codemasters hired a small booth at the PCW show which took place in 1986 at the Olympia exhibition complex in Hammersmith, London. It was there that they met Philip and Andrew Oliver who would go on to port Richard's Commodore 64 sequel *Professional BMX Simulator* to the Amstrad and ZX Spectrum. This game was essentially more of the same, albeit with the ability to play against up to three others.

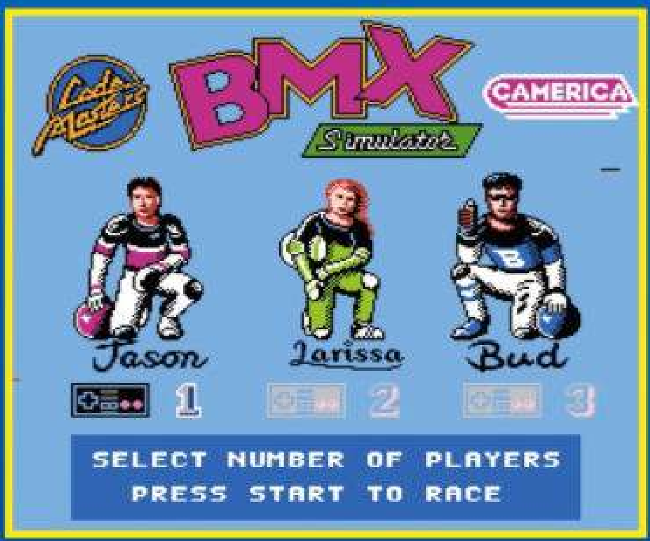
"As far as we knew *Professional BMX Simulator* was the first game on the Commodore 64 where you could use two joysticks and have two people on the keyboard so four players could play simultaneously," says David who cites its four-player ability as proof Codemasters would not scrimp on the development of games even though the titles were being sold at pocket-friendly prices.

"I don't know how many people ended up playing with a combination of joysticks and keyboard because we didn't get much feedback back then, but we always intended *BMX Simulator* to be a multiplayer game and we always thought multiplayer was important. We played it to death!"

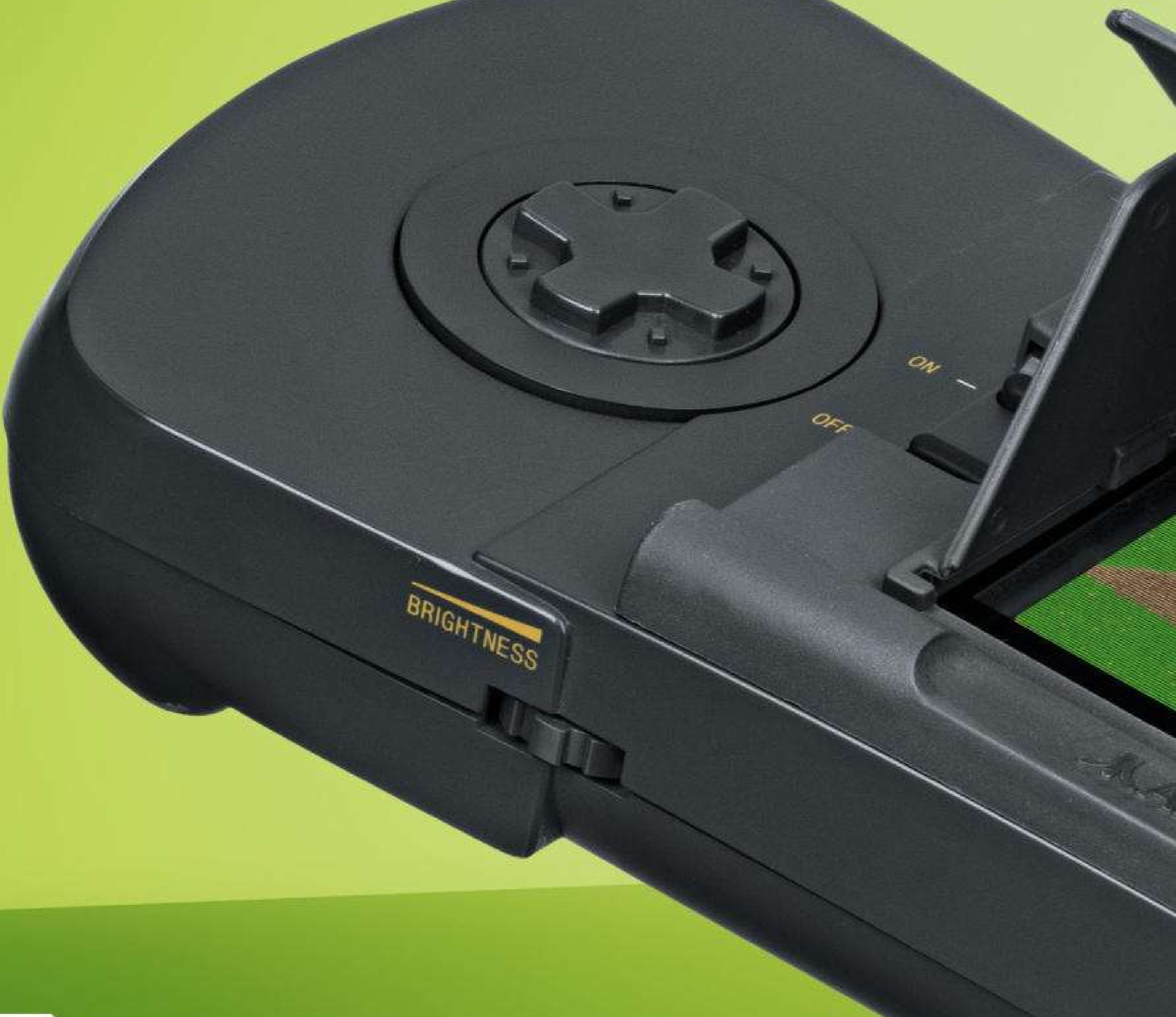
Even so, the sequel didn't quite match the initial impact of the original *BMX Simulator* and nor did it create the foundation on which Codemasters would go on to make its millions. "The first game was an immediate success in the charts and, of course, it launched Codemasters," says David, with *BMX Simulator* selling more than 100,000 copies in the first year.

"We followed it up with lots of other successful games in the first year which gave us a really good platform to start building the company," David continues. "We tapped into the demand for high-quality games at budget prices because there were a lot of games that people couldn't afford because they were too expensive. Lots of budget games were not of very good quality either, so when you made a high-quality game at a low price, they seemed to sell in quite big volumes. That was certainly the case for *BMX Simulator*." ✱

> "TIM MADE A GREAT VERSION FOR THE SPECTRUM WHICH DIDN'T LOOK QUITE AS GOOD BUT IT PLAYED REALLY WELL"
> **DAVID DARLING**



» [NES] With *BMX Simulator* on the NES, the riders had names and you could choose up to three.



Sun Visor fact

■ A second model of the sun visor/screen guard was released in 1991, which was designed to fit the new model of Atari Lynx introduced in the same year.

Sun Visor/ Screen Guard

» PLATFORM: Lynx **» RELEASED:** 1989
» COST: £5.99 (launch), £18+ (today, boxed) £18+ (today, unboxed)

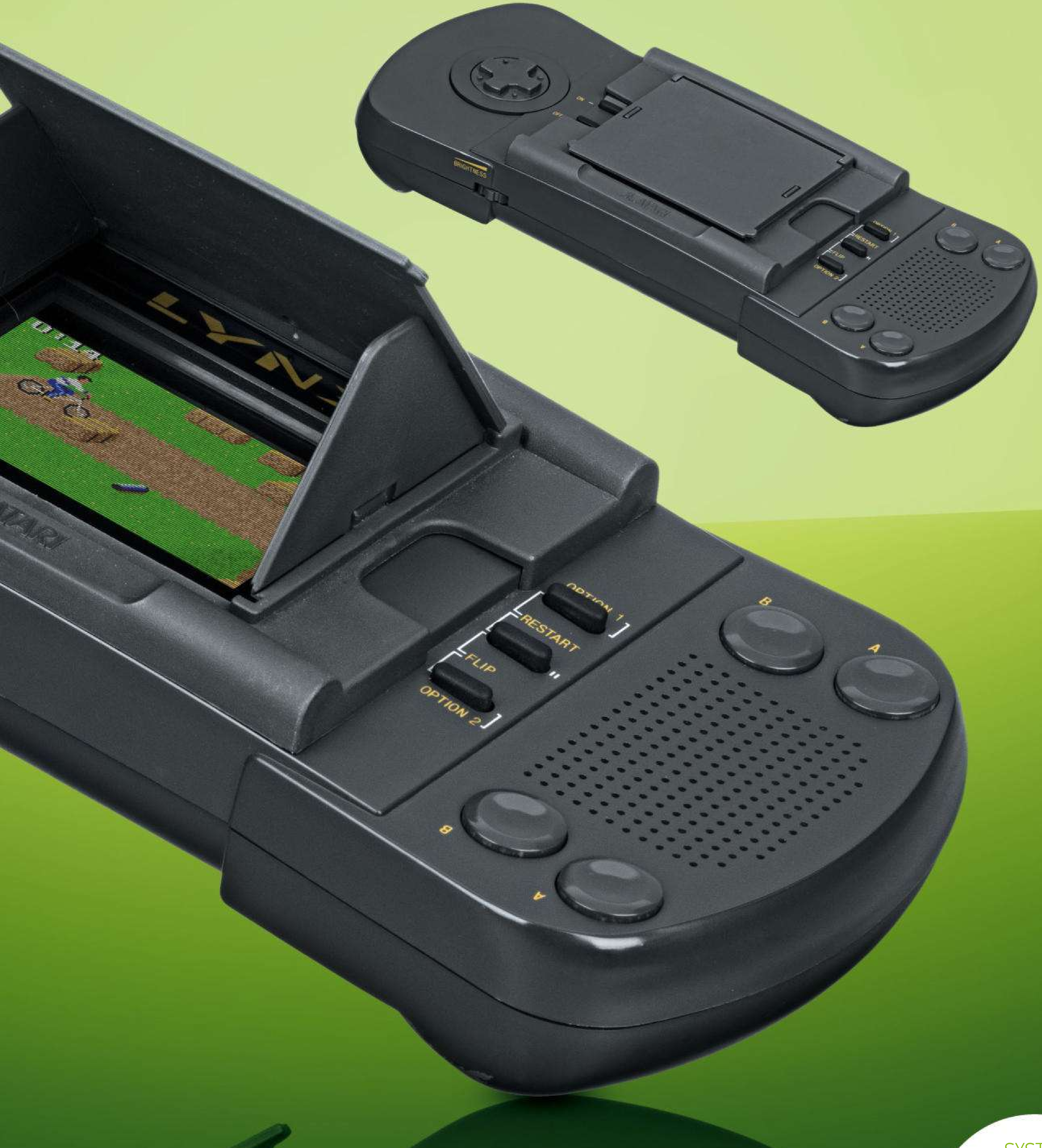
Some gaming peripherals take years of research and development to create, feature all sorts of fancy electronics and cost an absolute fortune. The sun visor for the Atari Lynx is not one of them. This plastic attachment clips to the front of your console and when the system is not in use, it functions as a guard to keep your screen free of damage. When it's time to play, pop that bad boy up and your screen will be shielded in a different way, preventing the backlit screen from struggling against the sun.

The construction of the device was very simple, with three hinged plastic pieces allowing you to switch between sun visor and screen guard functions. One small knock against it, however, was the fixed position of the sun visor – all of the plastic pieces fit together in one particular way, meaning that it was impossible to adjust the angle of the visor to your own preference. It's also not really ideal for vertical games like *Klax*, as you really need to remove the entire thing to see the screen. *

ESSENTIAL GAME

CALIFORNIA GAMES

Everyone loves a bit of surfing now and then – it's a tricky skill to master, but ultimately a very satisfying one, as you ride the waves and even throw in the odd flashy spin. Of course, we're talking about *California Games*, not real surfing. What kind of person takes their Lynx surfing? It'll get wet and break. However, you might choose to take your Lynx to the beach to at least soak up some of the atmosphere, as well as some sun, and in that case you'll want to bring that sun visor with you. You won't get far without it.

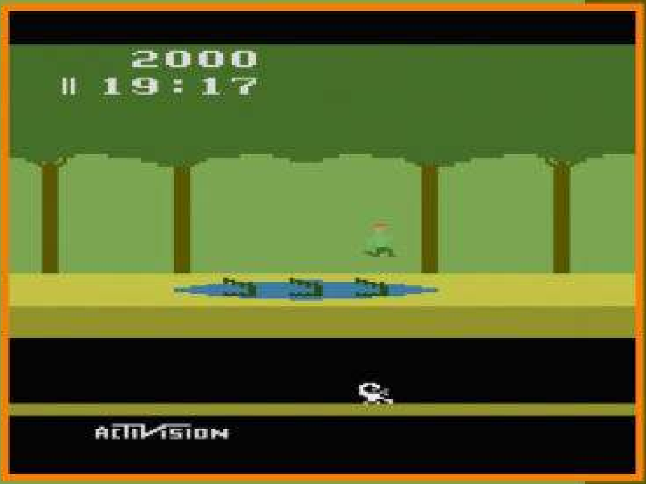

LYNX
ATARI
BRIGHTNESS
OPTION 1
RESTART
FLIP
OPTION 2
B
A
B
A

SYSTEM
SUPPLIED BY
**EVAN
AMOS**

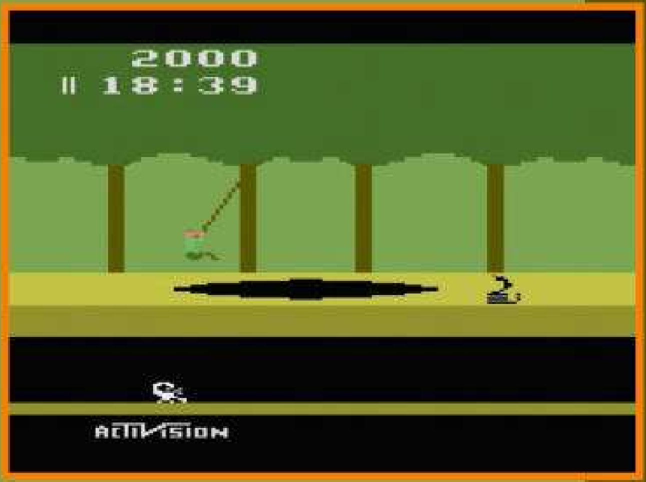
THE EVOLUTION OF PITFALL!

As well as inspiring its developer David Crane to make a sequel, the phenomenally successful Pitfall! also influenced his subsequent platform games. David explains how they evolved and distinguished themselves from his classic Atari 2600 adventure

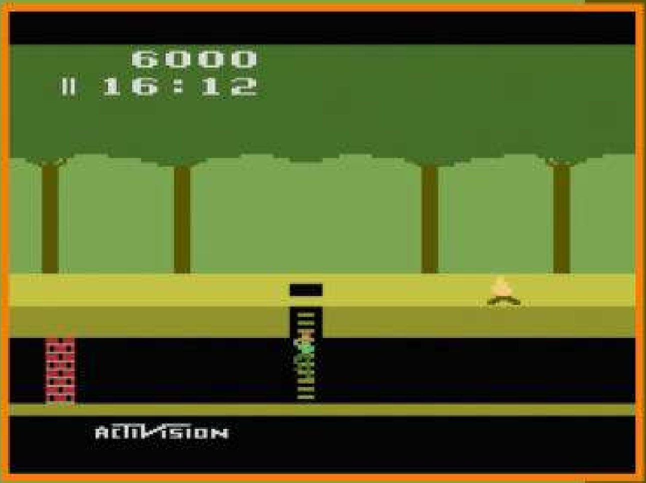
WORDS BY RORY MILNE



[Atari 2600] *Pitfall!*'s use of alligators as stepping stones was inspired by the cartoon *Heckle And Jeckle*.



[Atari 2600] *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* influenced David Crane's decision to set *Pitfall!* in a jungle.



Prior to the release of *Pitfall!* in 1982, the vast majority – if not all platform games – had been linear and level-based. David Crane's platformer, by comparison, was set in a sprawling jungle environment, and as David explains, it really pushed the humble Atari 2600. "*Pitfall!* was built from the ground up using my newly-created human figure – once I *finally* achieved a recognisable character using just eight bits," David sighs. "Then while dreaming up the game I placed the character running on a path, and it was only natural to place that path in a jungle. I didn't set out to make a jungle adventure, but an adventure game, which ended up in a jungle because it provided an appropriate setting. *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* had been in theatres, so the idea of setting *Pitfall!* in a jungle was partially inspired by that."

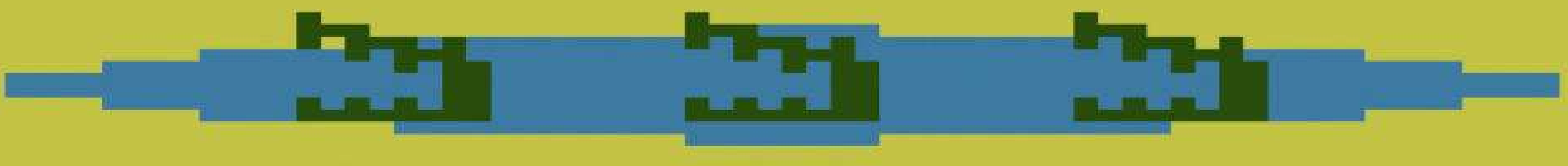
With a hero and setting in place, David next populated his platform game with pairs of hazards, carefully gauging their overall threat to test players without frustrating them. "It was important to tweak each interaction to be fun," David reasons. "You never had to deal with rolling logs while trying to jump the alligators, for example. But it was not unusual to have rolling logs on paths with holes, so you had to be careful where you stood for your jump. Each interaction was such that once a player reached a certain level of skill they would be able to beat them. So players were first introduced to the alligators with a swinging vine, and only later did they encounter them *without* a vine."

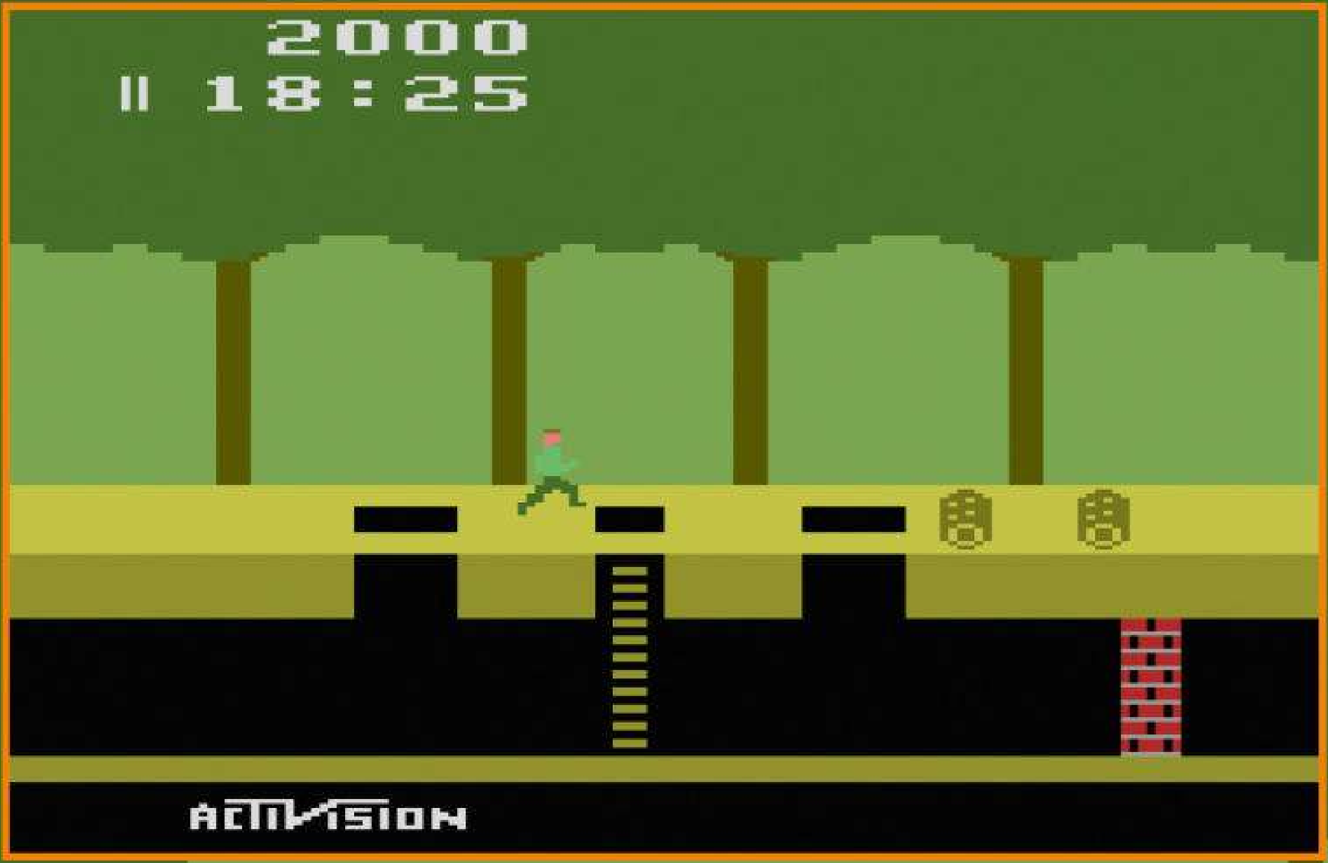
Although he's still making games, David Crane doesn't plan to make another *Pitfall!* title.

Having based *Pitfall!*'s core objectives around survival – and ultimately escape, David next gave players a sidequest, which involved finding gold bars to boost their score. "In those days we played games for points," David reflects, "and collecting treasure was the only way to earn points. My recollection is that there were 32 treasures, but that was plenty, as it gave me the depth of gameplay I wanted."

Further efforts to broaden *Pitfall!*'s scope followed, as David doubled the size of his adventure by locating scorpion-filled cave systems beneath its jungle trails. "To expand the gameplay, I added an underground path," David remembers, "and I turned that path into a shortcut – travelling underground traversed the jungle at triple speed, advancing a single underground screen at the speed of three above-ground screens. But any advantage came with a cost. The scorpions required a higher level of skill to jump, so the player had to master that skill to use the shortcut."

The layers of gameplay in David's platformer were duly noted on its release – *Pitfall!* was lauded by critics and sold in its millions. A year later, David designed an in-cartridge chip to support a bigger, better looking sequel with four-channel music. "*Pitfall II* added multiple levels of depth to the caverns rather than the





> "Raiders Of The Lost Ark had been in theatres, so the idea of setting Pitfall! in a jungle was partially inspired by that"
>
> **DAVID CRANE**

single underground level in *Pitfall!*," David says of his follow-up's grander scale. "The game led Pitfall Harry deep into the caverns, despite the fact that his final goal laid just beyond his reach – one level below his feet. So by design, the player had to investigate and collect treasure in the lowest levels before heading back up, allowing for additional *depth* of gameplay – pun intended!"

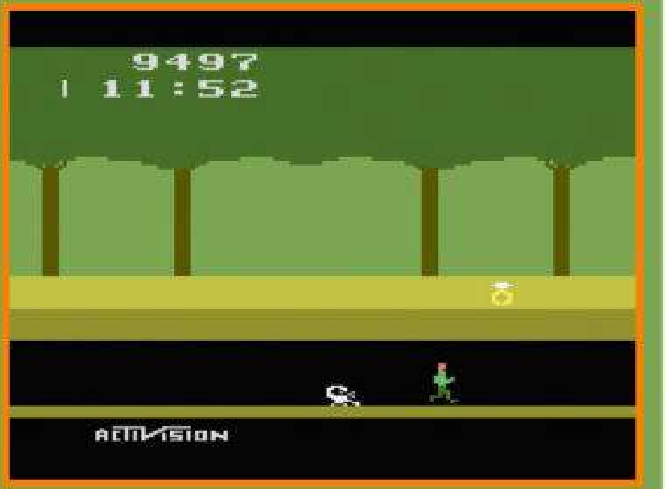
In order to further differentiate *Pitfall II* from its predecessor, David gave its hero a way to float up through its caves, although it didn't quite fit the sequel's storyline. "Ironically, I was never directly asked 'Where do helium-filled balloons come from in the deepest, darkest levels of an underground cavern?'" David says wryly. "The answer would have been 'Because it's a videogame!'. Quite often when designing for the Atari 2600 we would add objects just because we could make them look good in 8 bits of graphics. Well the balloon looked really nice, and playing a circus-like song while riding the balloon let me show off the polyphonic musical hardware in my DPC chip."

Another of *Pitfall II*'s innovations came in the form of flooded caves, which David populated with electric eels and bookended with waterfalls. "I added the river because I could," David beams. "It was pretty, and it gave *Pitfall II* a greater distinction from the original. In addition, I put a waterfall – a one-way obstacle – into the river to force Harry to go deeper into the caverns. As for adding more challenges, water-based or otherwise, I was quite happy with the gameplay. A designer has to be able to judge when a game has enough content. Otherwise a design can go on for years and never be enjoyed by the public."

Once finished, the public certainly enjoyed *Pitfall II*, so much so that it topped the US sales charts. However, David decided against a third game, and five years passed before his next platformer, a NES title that he developed with Garry Kitchen. "*A Boy And His Blob* belonged to a different genre from *Pitfall!* and *Pitfall II*," David argues, "it was a 'tool-using adventure' that happened to be set in a platform game world. But I didn't like the idea of breaking the story-flow to pause the game and pull up an inventory screen, select a tool or weapon, and return to the game. The inspiration to use a buddy character – who happened to be a shape-changing alien blob – solved that issue for me."

Unlike *Pitfall!*, the levels in David and Garry's platformer just had platforms and hazards, thanks to its shape-shifting alien Blobert, because if you needed a ladder, for example, you just turned him *into* a ladder by feeding him a specific jellybean. "Having the blob go through animating transformations was both very innovative and visually attractive," David enthuses. "Next came the creation of a world design that presented challenges that you could only overcome with Blobert's help, and bags of jellybeans scattered around to discover and use."

In an effort to give their platformer greater depth, David and Garry added shoot-'em-up elements to its later stages, but otherwise their game took inspiration from one of



[Atari 2600] You can speed through the caves in *Pitfall!*, but watch out for the deadly scorpions.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: PHYSICAL CHALLENGES

FROM PITFALLS AND TRAMPOLINES TO LEAPING LAKES AND GRAPPLING HOOKS

PITFALL!

Given the influence of *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* on *Pitfall!*, it's unsurprising that the game incorporates a whole host of physical challenges. Its tests of timing and agility include swinging over rivers on vines, leaping over pits and using hungry alligators as stepping stones.

A BOY AND HIS BLOB

TANGERINE = TRAMPOLINE

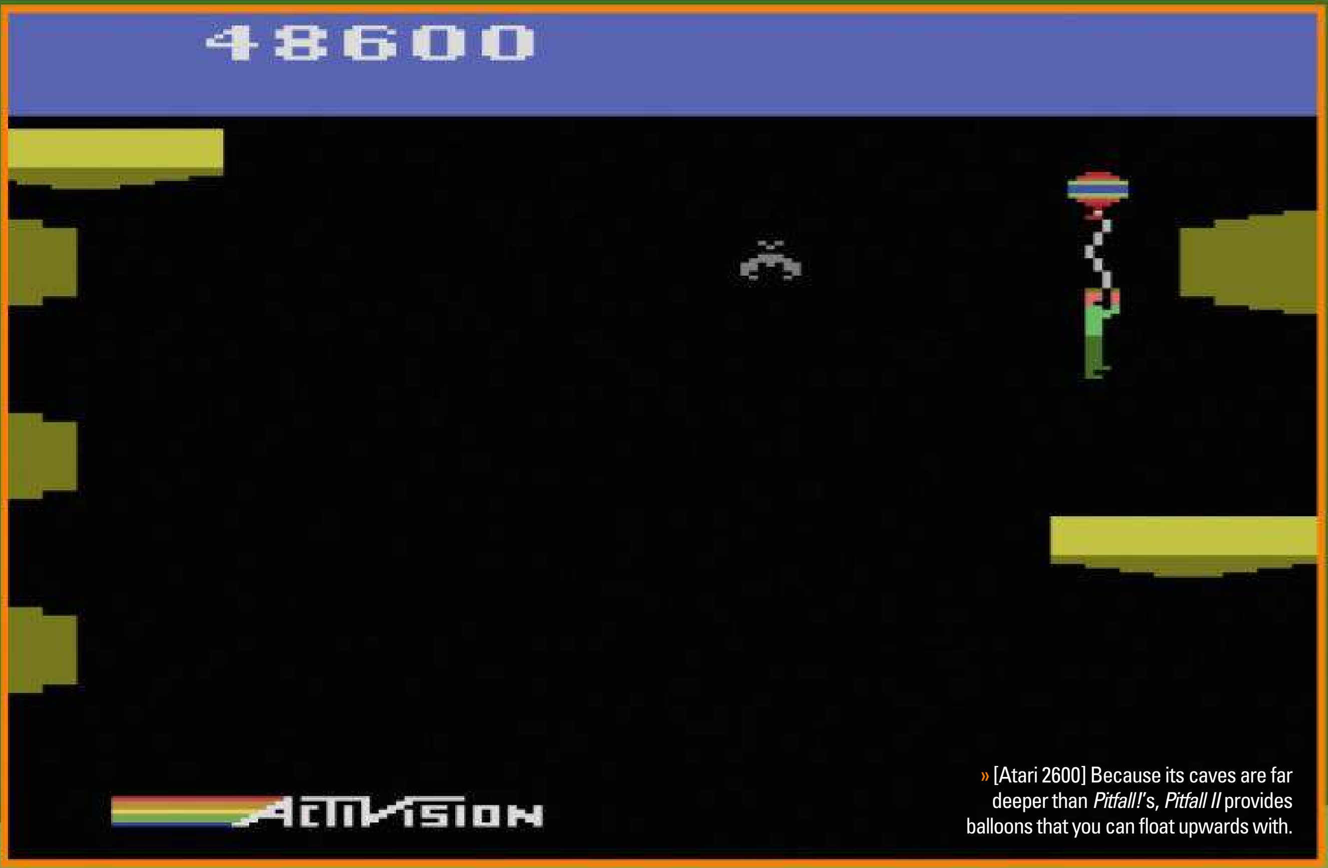
Not all of the forms that the blob in *A Boy And His Blob* takes provide you with ways to overcome physical obstacles, but the most commonly used ones do. Its trampoline form, for example, allows you to reach higher platforms, and when it's an umbrella you can use it as a parachute.

ESCAPE FROM CAMP DEADLY

In addition to typical platforming challenges like avoiding enemies and collecting objects, *Camp Deadly* incorporates a series of superficially similar lakes. You need to guide Bart Simpson safely over these, with the twist being that you need a different strategy to cross each one.

POWER TOOL PURSUIT

Of the themed levels in *Power Tool Pursuit*, its *Pitfall!*-inspired jungle stages impress the most, but the game's challenges are largely the same throughout. There are chasms to jump, stacked platforms to ascend and ledges that you swing up to with your hand-held grappling hook tool.

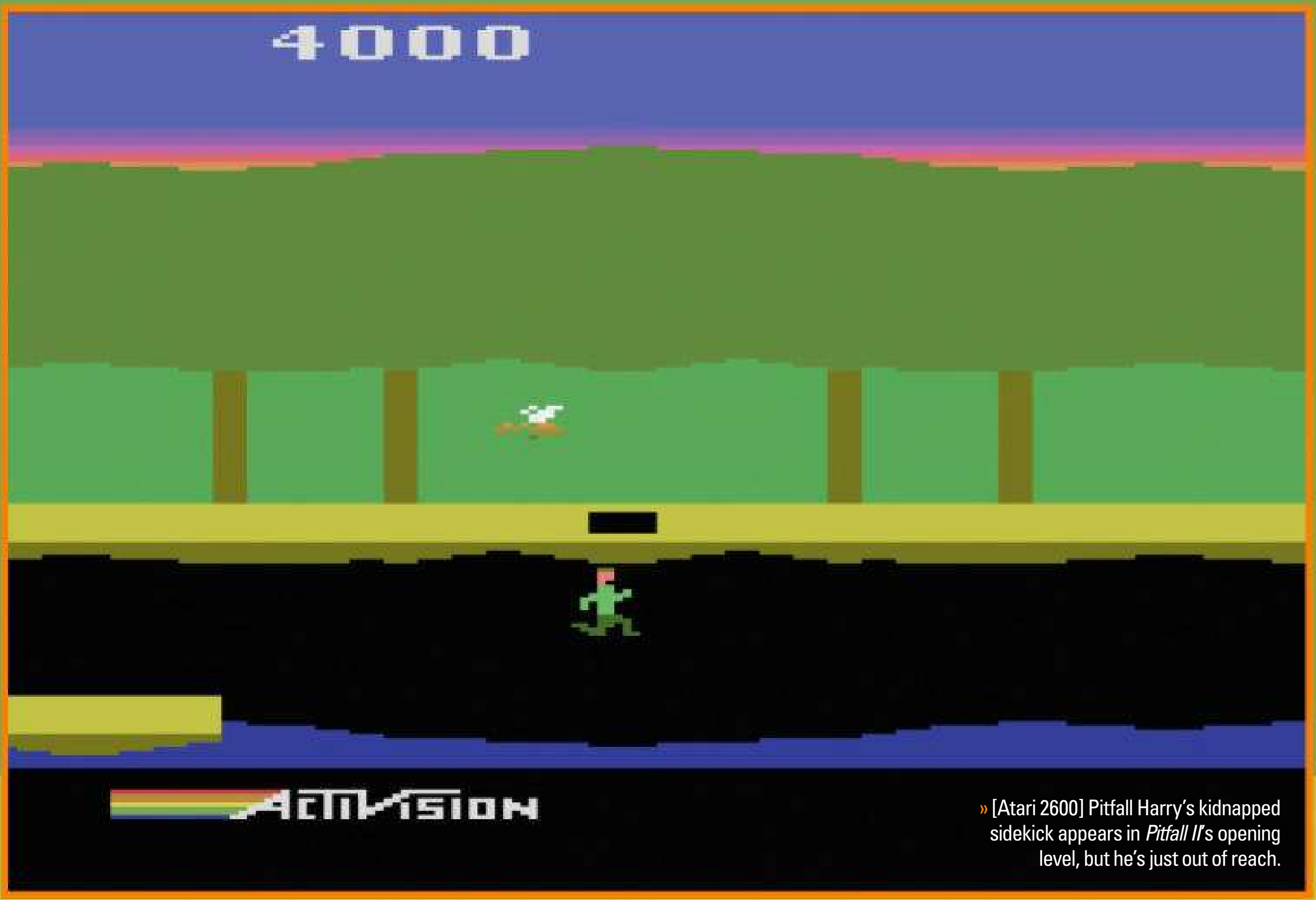


» [Atari 2600] Because its caves are far deeper than *Pitfall!*'s, *Pitfall II* provides balloons that you can float upwards with.

David's earlier triumphs. "We decided to design the game in two 'acts' that each took place in different environments," David explains. "The first was a two-dimensional underground cavern as a homage to *Pitfall II*, but for the second we wanted something completely different, and Garry settled on a rapid-fire shooter. Either 'act' might have been enough for a NES game, but the two together would be dynamite."

With the majority of *A Boy And His Blob* channelling David's *Pitfall!* follow-up, underwater sections were an obvious addition to the NES project, although unlike those in *Pitfall II* they were free of electric eels and there was no swimming required. "The gameplay in the caverns required the use of tools – namely Blobert, so it only made sense for the boy to navigate the underwater sections of the game not by swimming but by figuring out how to use the blob," David explains. "Spoiler alert: you could breathe inside a giant cola bubble, and while riding underwater inside it you had to combat buoyancy and currents, and get to treasures without popping the bubble on sharp rocks. Adding enemies might have been nice, but they were not necessary." Of course, there was also the NES platformer's second stage, which David and Garry set on a fictional planet where hazards had to be blasted with a 'VitaBlaster' that fired vitamins bought with treasure from the game's earlier cavern level. "After we created the fantasy backstory it was a simple matter to have the boy take his collected treasure on Earth to the health food store, buy vitamins and rocket off to Blobolonia to save the vitamin-depleted planet," David recalls. "Although I should note that neither Garry nor I are recreational drug users, regardless of how the story of Blobolonia might sound!"

In fact, recreational drug use was the very last thing David and Garry wanted *A Boy And His Blob* to promote, especially given its target audience. "Early testing showed us that the game was likely to skew toward younger players – largely due to the cute backstory, I suppose," David contemplates, "so Garry and I tweaked the availability of jellybeans to keep younger players involved. If we had been designing for more hardcore players we could have tweaked the jellybean supply to make the game far more challenging."



» [Atari 2600] Pitfall Harry's kidnapped sidekick appears in *Pitfall II*'s opening level, but he's just out of reach.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:
TREASURE HUNTER

HOW GOLD BARS AND DRUG MONEY LED TO LOST COINS AND HIDDEN CRATES

PITFALL!

2000
ACTIVISION

Your score in *Pitfall!* is like an energy bar. It isn't affected by falling in a river or colliding with foes – those cost lives, but inanimate hazards reduce your score. This adds meaning to finding *Pitfall!*'s gold bars, as that's the only way to achieve a respectable points tally.

A BOY AND HIS BLOB

121500
TR=01
5
HEALTH FOODS
59 LICORICE JELLYBEANS

Technically speaking, you have to find coins to buy vitamins in *A Boy And His Blob*, but that's still a treasure hunt for drug money – albeit a legal one. Once you've scored some pills, rather than popping them to get a power-up you use them as ammo in a side-scrolling shoot-'em-up.

RESCUE OF PRINCESS BLOBETTE

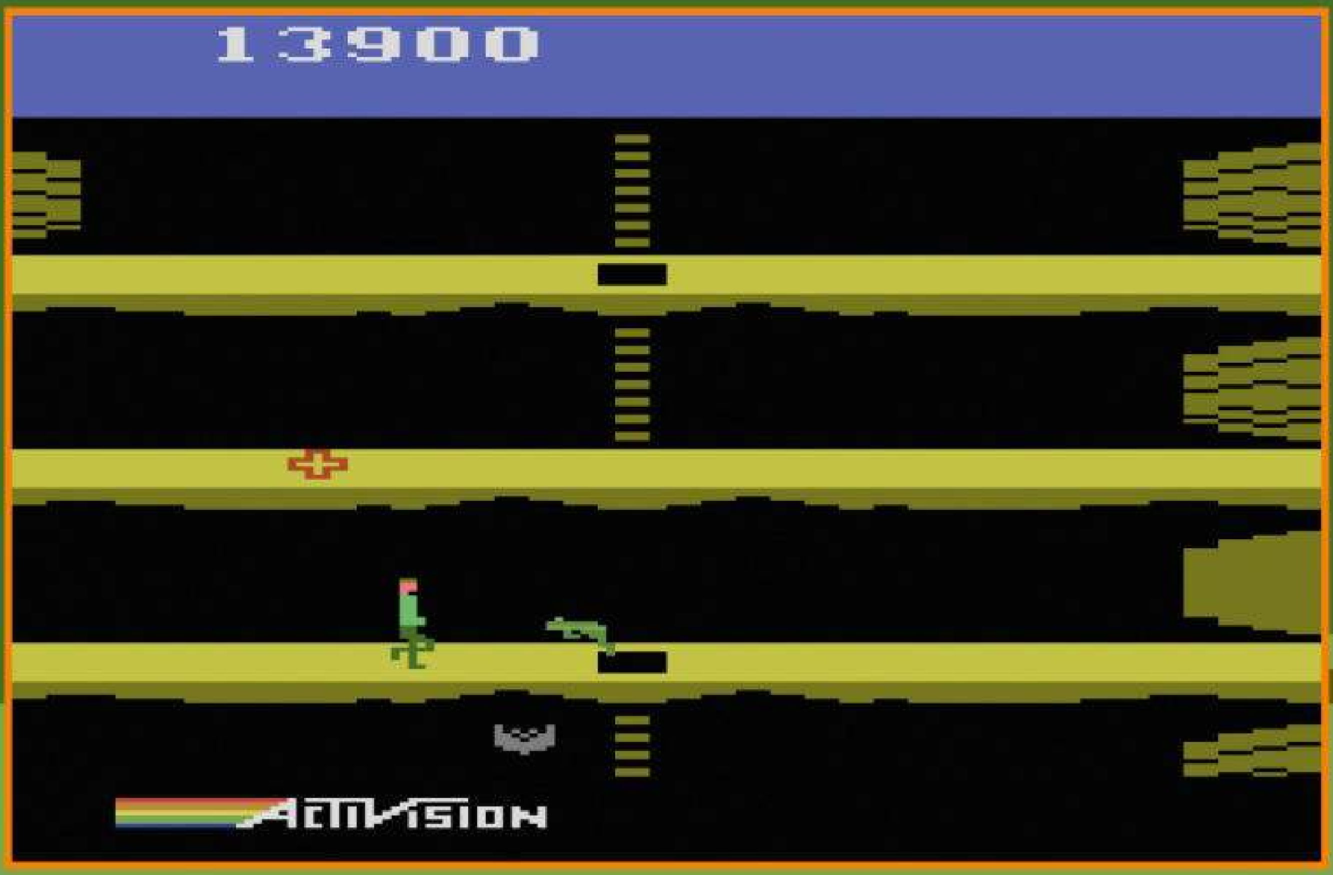
15000 TR15 01 5
33 TANGERINE

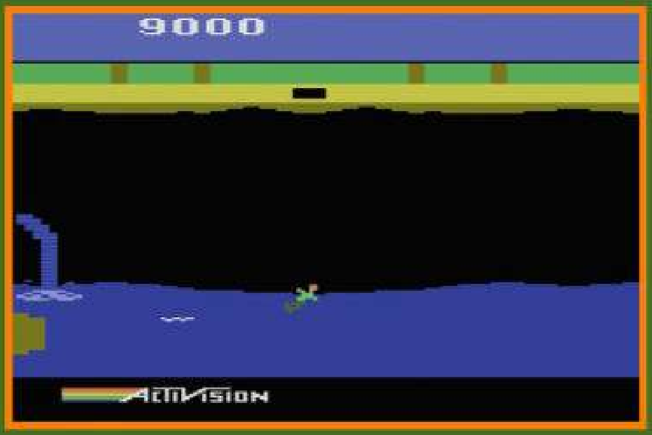
Like its predecessor *A Boy And His Blob*, there's lots of treasure to collect in *Princess Blobette*. At first glance, this seems pointless, because there's nothing to spend it on, but finding all the loot unlocks a secret area full of swag, and that gives the game extra replay value.

POWER TOOL PURSUIT

SCORE
500
TIME 720
HIGH
0050000
x09
x03

Unlike David Crane's previous platformers, *Power Tool Pursuit* makes treasure hunting a core objective, where you level-up by finding hidden crates. These are full of power tools rather than gold bars or coins, which makes sense as the game's hero Tim Taylor loves power tools.





» [Atari 2600] *Pitfall II*'s sprawling caverns incorporate rivers, and are a major step up from the original's linear caves.

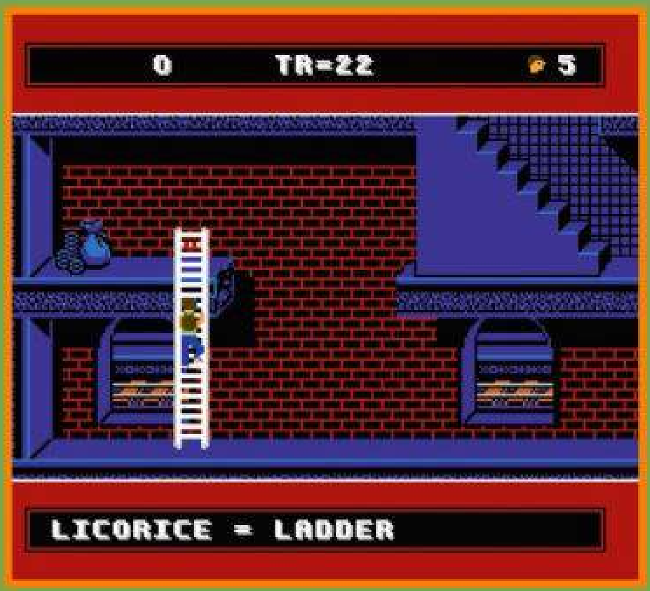
6000 TR=20 5
VANILLA = UMBRELLA

0 TR=22 5
PUNCH = HOLE

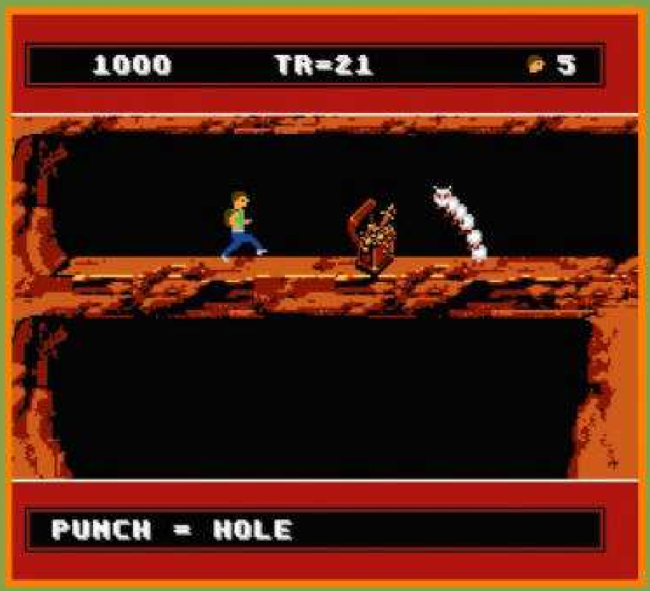
As it turned out, the wholesome story of a boy with a blob who shot vitamins rather than bullets went down extremely well with players and parents alike. So much so, that David moved straight onto designing a Game Boy follow-up. "*Rescue Of Princess Blobette* was an entirely original game, as opposed to a Game Boy port of the original," David notes. "To me that meant I should create some new and different blob transformations, with new and different associated interactions. The combination of the screen size and the memory configuration I was designing to also made it possible to animate some backgrounds. I believe the first idea I had was turning Blobert into a monkey wrench in order to 'throw a monkey wrench into the machinery'. That led to creating animated machines that gave the player other challenges to figure out." As well as its animated machines, David's handheld platformer further distinguished itself from its NES counterpart by making its treasure hunt a less essential part of its core gameplay. "Most games had a numerical score – and *Blobette* had that," David considers. "I learned from *Pitfall!* that people were interested in how many treasures they had collected – and *Blobette showed* that. *Blobette* required more puzzle solving, including the collection of a number of coins that opened a treasure vault once all were collected, so I wouldn't describe the treasure collection as optional. It was mandatory for the player who wanted to 'beat' the game. That said, you could play *Blobette* in a number of different ways."

A second major differentiation from *A Boy And His Blob* followed, as David added puzzles to his Game Boy follow-up that had solutions that didn't require the blob. "Rather than making the blob redundant, these additions made the jellybeans more relevant," David

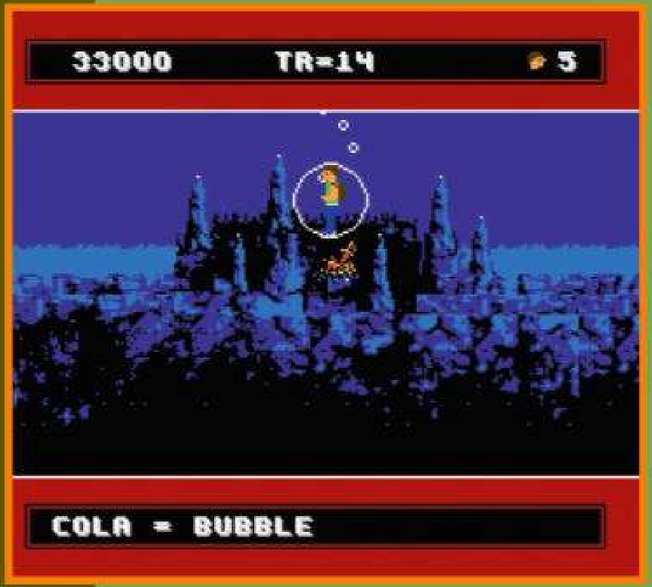
> "Pitfall II added multiple levels of depth to the caverns rather than the single underground level in Pitfall!"
>
> **DAVID CRANE**



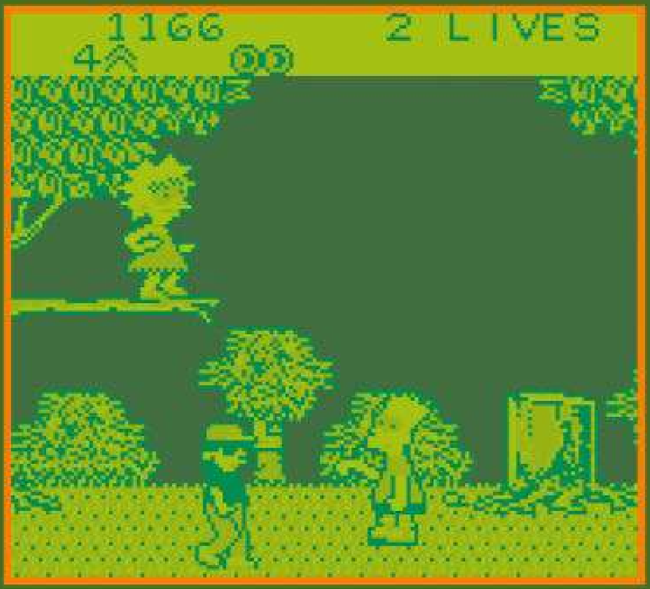
» [NES] Like *Pitfall!*, *A Boy And His Blob* has ladders – although they're actually your shape-shifting blob.



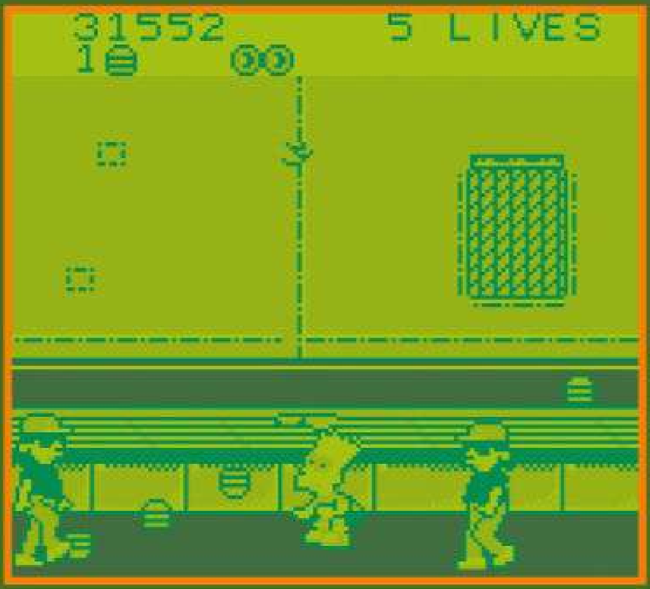
» [NES] *A Boy And His Blob*'s deadly serpents bounce from left to right, exactly like *Pitfall II*'s poisonous toads.



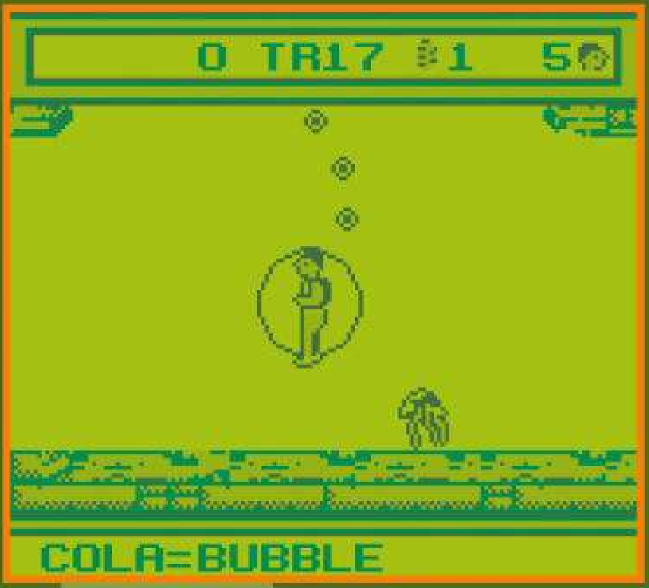
» [NES] The caverns in *A Boy And His Blob* were inspired by *Pitfall II* – they even have sections that are waterlogged.

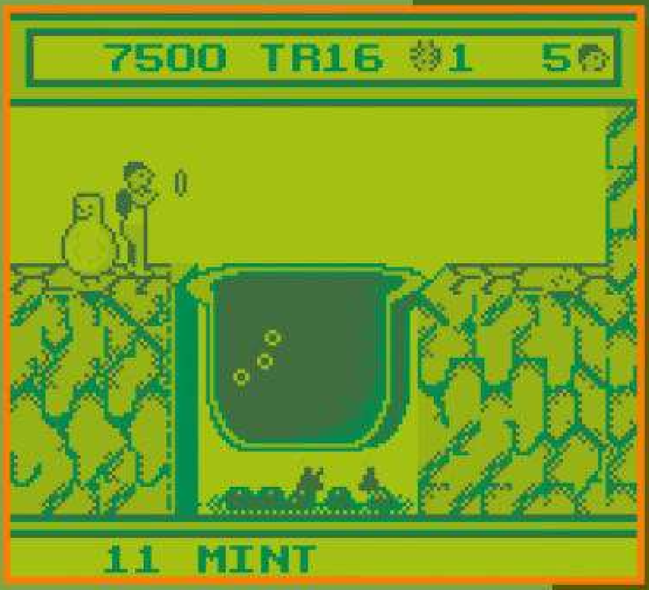


» [Game Boy] *Where A Boy And His Blob* has a vitamin-blasting gun, *Camp Deadly* has spitballs and boomerangs.

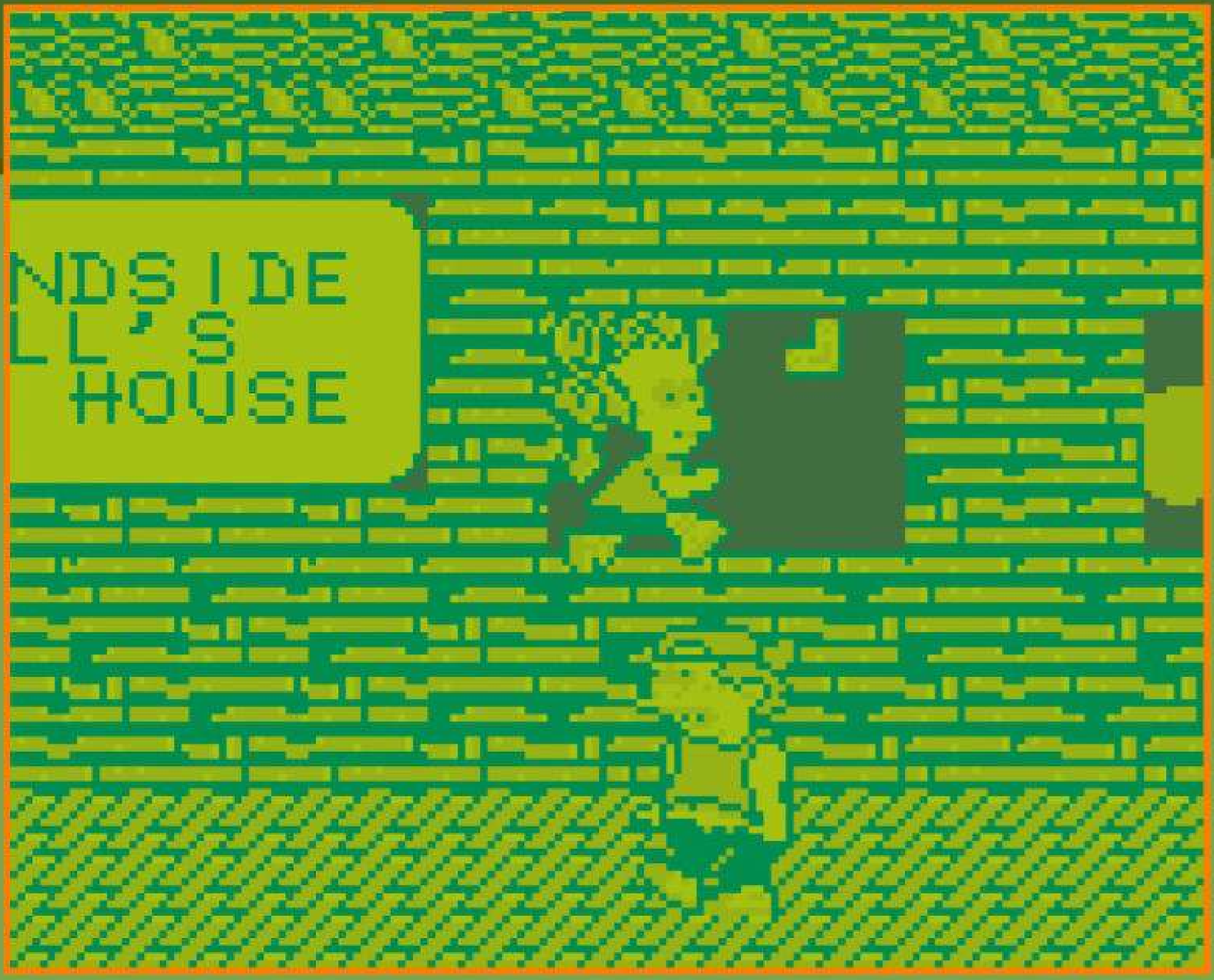


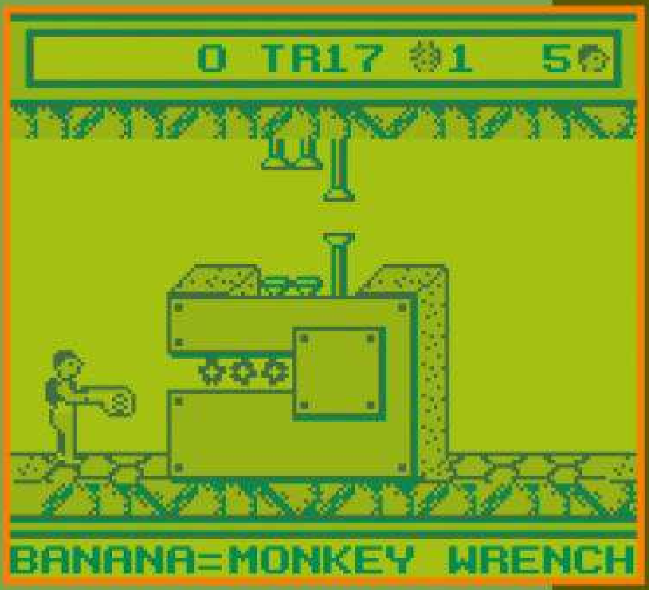
» [Game Boy] The food fight intermissions in *Camp Deadly* hark back to *Pitfall!*'s focus on jumping foes and hazards.





» [Game Boy] Although the blob is essential in *Princess Blobette*, he isn't required for some puzzles.





» [Game Boy] Unlike its predecessor *A Boy And His Blob*, *Princess Blobette* has various machine-based puzzles.

"Every game is built on different foundations. Bart Simpson would never go unarmed into a jungle"

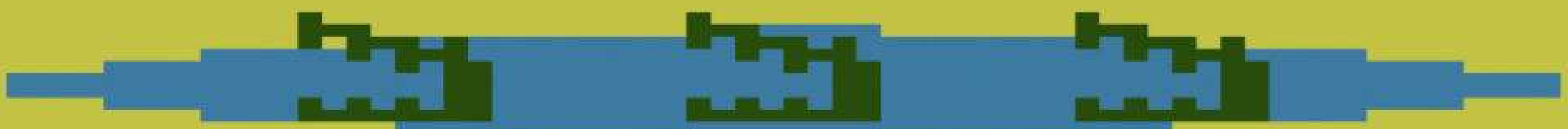
DAVID CRANE

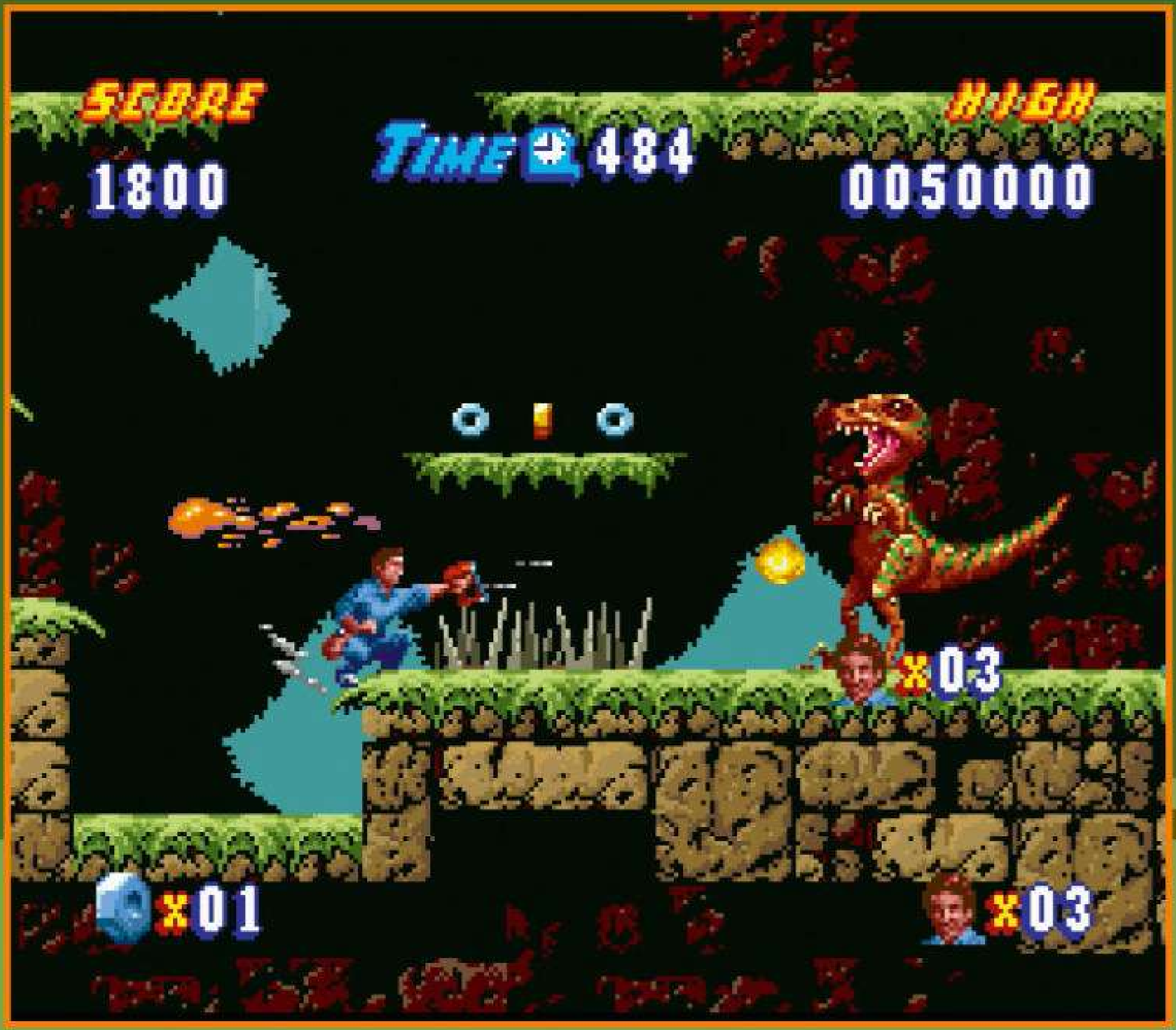
observes. "A player who had used the blob for many other tasks would initially be stumped trying to collect certain treasures. The only way to collect one diamond, for example, was to douse one of the torches – something the blob could not do. So what a wonderful discovery when you found out that the 'cool mint' jellybean put out the fire."

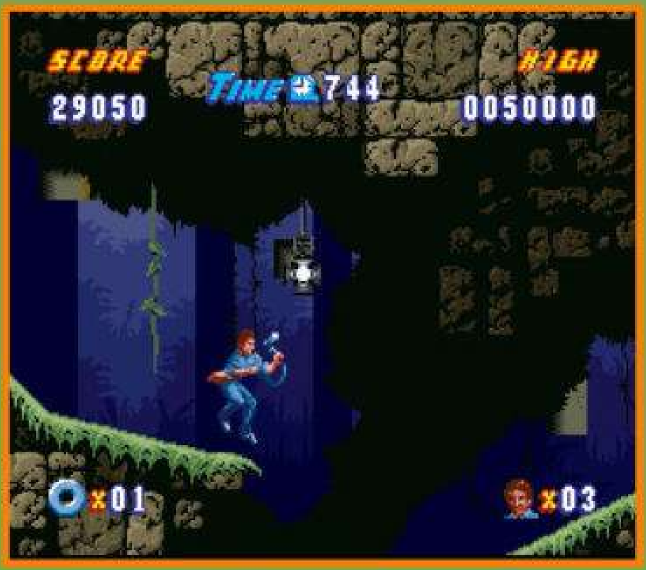
Although *Rescue Of Princess Blobette* reviewed well when it came out, David didn't continue his *Blob* franchise. But the next year he worked on another Game Boy platformer, with a less heroic, less virtuous protagonist than his *Blob* or *Pitfall* titles. "Every game is built on different foundations," David points out. "Bart Simpson would never go unarmed into a jungle in the way that Pitfall Harry did, and he would more likely use the blob in far less acceptable ways than as simple ladders and bridges. Likewise, he would go to summer camp armed with adolescent weapons. The spitballs and boomerangs were appropriate options, and each had its own effect in the game."

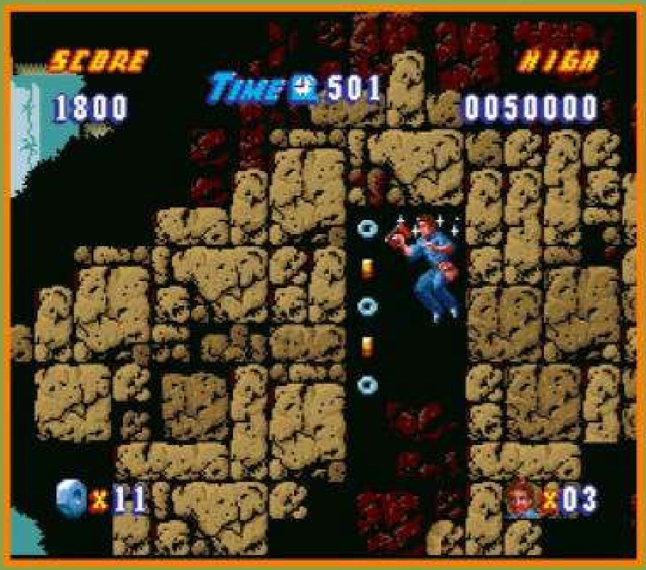
Like he had done with *A Boy And His Blob*, David opted to complement the platforming in his *Simpsons* platformer – *Escape From Camp Deadly* – with some pure shoot-'em-up interludes. "I wanted to give *Camp Deadly* more twitch gameplay than passive adventuring, and my favourite section was the food fight," David beams. "Having to turn around to throw food at your pursuers – losing ground to them to do so – was a delicious trade off between speed and strategy. I tweaked the heck out of the timing until it became one of my favourite scenes in any of the games I published."

On its release, some reviewers loved *Camp Deadly*'s intense platforming while others found it rather unforgiving. Three years later, David co-designed a licensed SNES platformer called *Home Improvement: Power Tool Pursuit*, and unlike *Pitfall!*, finding its treasures was essential. "*Home Improvement: Power Tool Pursuit* was a game from the mid-Nineties, after tens of thousands of games had been created, including many games of that type," David muses, "so unlike the Seventies, where









[SNES] In many ways, *Power Tool Pursuit* is *Pitfall!* for the 16-bit era – especially its opening jungle stages.

[SNES] As with *Pitfall!*, *Power Tool Pursuit*'s jungle trails lead to underground caverns full of treasure.

the hardware barely allowed us to display a score, many different scoring metrics could be added, and so different players could have different goals when playing."

As with David's *Pitfall* titles, *Power Tool Pursuit* started off in a jungle with a cave system. It featured hanging vines too, but its hero favoured swinging around on a rope and grappling hook. "Ten or fifteen artists, animators, programmers and layout designers created the backgrounds, weapons, player physics and animations to show the player in action," David recollects, "and we put them all together over time. While developing the game, someone came up with a tool that provided a grappling hook effect, and it worked well in the context of the game – it was as simple as that."

Like he had with *A Boy And His Blob* and *Camp Deadly*, David armed *Power Tool Pursuit*'s protagonist, more specifically with power tools acquired by beating bosses. David puts these mechanics down to an organic process with corporate oversight. "The weapons that didn't make sense were discarded, the world layouts were tweaked and the boss monsters evolved," David reviews. "It all seemed to work well at the time, and that was a style of game that the studio could understand, and thus the style of game that they approved."

In keeping with *Camp Deadly*, *Power Tool Pursuit* split the critics, and David hasn't made another platform game since, but when the still-active developer is asked if he might follow-up his most famous platformer *Pitfall!* it's obvious that he's full of ideas. "I have no driving need to follow-up *Pitfall II* with a sequel, nor could I if I wanted to, since *Pitfall!* and Pitfall Harry are owned by today's Activision," David makes clear. "But a David Crane game on a modern console would probably be a side view, 2.5D scrolling game with multiple depths to the background. There would be a number of different environments, and there would certainly be something fun to do. What is fun? Even after nearly 100 published games, that is still something that I can only say 'I will know it when I see it.'" ✱

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: EPIC EXPLORATION

JUNGLES, CAVERNS, ALIEN PLANETS AND A HELLISH SUMMER CAMP

PITFALL!

27505
1 9:24
ACTIVISION

It's amazing to think that platformers before *Pitfall!* typically consisted of a few stages that played out in a fixed order. By comparison, *Pitfall!*'s massive jungle can be explored however you want and spans 255 different levels, each with a sub-level cave beneath a ground-level pathway.

PITFALL II

28600
ACTIVISION

The caves in *Pitfall!* are taken to a whole new level in its follow-up. Whereas the original game has a single, linear cave system, *Pitfall II* has vast cavernous regions that incorporate underground rivers, eclectic enemies and even helium balloons to take you up from the depths.

A BOY AND HIS BLOB

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5
843 VITAMIN C

The inspiration that *A Boy And His Blob*'s vast cavern stages take from *Pitfall II* is plain to see, but its later levels are entirely original. After landing on an alien world and blasting bouncing hazards, you have to switch off various machines before confronting the game's boss.

ESCAPE FROM CAMP DEADLY

156204
6 LIVES

The camp in *Camp Deadly* is nothing but comprehensive. As well as woodland walks patrolled by councillors that Bart Simpson has to fend off with spitballs, there are tree-hut boss levels with pits to leap over. Some later stages put Bart underground, and send him up a mountain.

Darran Jones

What cherished games would you take to the island?

To mark 200 issues editing Retro Gamer, we maroon Darran Jones and wonder if he'll take Strider to his desert island. Spoiler: Yes he will

Words by Paul Drury

FIRST JOB
Paperboy

CURRENT JOB
Editor of Retro Gamer

FAVOURITE FILM
Boogie Nights

FAVOURITE ALBUM
Dog Man Star - Suede

FAVOURITE BOOK:
The Stand - Stephen King

FIRST COMPUTER/CONSOLE
Amstrad CPC 464

FAVOURITE COMPUTER/CONSOLE
Mega Drive

BEST GAMING ACHIEVEMENT
Editing RG for so long

BEST HOLIDAY
The Maldives

WHO YOU WANT TO BE STRANDED WITH
My wife, Melanie. She's my best friend.

205-068105103032068117103

SEX
M

NAME
Darran Jones

DATE OF BIRTH
1973

PLACE OF BIRTH
Poole

BIOGRAPHY
Darran edited the retro section of gamesTM before taking over editorship of Retro Gamer in 2005, giving him exclusive rights to the office Mario costume.

<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<

Having been at the helm of the magazine you currently hold for 15 years, we are pretty confident Darran Jones is the longest-serving editor of a mainstream videogaming publication in the UK. We assume games journalism was always a career goal?

"Not at all," Darran corrects us. "I didn't get into it until I was 30 years old, which is pretty ancient in gaming mag terms. It's probably why I found it so hard at first.

"I was a late bloomer!"

Darran left school at the tender age of 15 and worked in supermarkets and then insurance for over a decade. Not your typical route to becoming a magazine editor, though his love of Dungeon Mastering at least helped him get used to being in charge. He got his break writing for website Gamestyle in 2002 and when *games™* launched that year, he realised they were based in his home town of Bournemouth. After an unsuccessful attempt to work on *DVD Review*, he managed to land the news editor job on *games™* and took on the editorship of the retro section at the end of 2003, shortly before **Retro Gamer** hit the shelves.

"They were encroaching on my turf," he laughs. "I felt I was doing really cool stuff with the limited space and resources I had at *games™* and here was a full mag dedicated to retro, so it was bound to get all the focus. I'd make little swipes at them and they'd do it back. There was dickishness on both sides. Martyn [Carroll – **Retro Gamer** launch editor] and I have joked about it and I can't have offended him too much because he still writes for the mag. When the original publisher went down in 2005, it was one less competitor I had to worry about. I never thought for one second I'd end up editing it…"

After a few months in limbo following Live Publishing's demise, the **Retro Gamer** name was bought by Imagine Publishing and Darran was the natural choice to head the relaunched magazine. "I thought maybe I'd get to do 30 issues and then it'd be gone so I had this wish list of stuff I wanted to do," he smiles. "I ticked it off years ago. The Making of *Strider* was on it of course!"

Though Darran acknowledges the pressure of meeting relentless deadlines doesn't get any easier, he remains intensely proud of keeping the magazine in rude health for so long, noting that at one point in his tenure as editor, 12 gaming monthlies were being produced in the Bournemouth office and that's now dwindled to just **Retro Gamer**. We wonder if he might even beat Hugh Hefner's world record of 60 years as editor of *Playboy*. "I'd love to but I'll be dead," he laughs. "It is my dream job, though. Like any job, being editor of **Retro Gamer** has its ups and downs but I couldn't imagine myself doing anything else." *

A Rare Find

When asked which **Retro Gamer** article he is most proud of, Darran answers without hesitation. "Interviewing the Stamper brothers just before they disappeared. I loved their games growing up and I pestered them for months. Finally, Chris sent me a really nice reply saying they were pleased we wanted to talk to them but they were more interested in looking forward than back and politely declined. I said 'Look if you answer these four questions, I won't bother you for six months. Promise'. I sent double the number of questions and they answered them for the Spectrum Legends article in issue 29… then they sold Rare and have been a nightmare to get in contact with ever since!"

"So I get to keep the Mario costume, right?" Darran and launch editor Martyn Carroll (left) talk office politics at a 2007 retro event.

> "Being editor of Retro Gamer has its ups and downs but I couldn't imagine myself doing anything else"
> Darran Jones

Darran's Desert Island Disks

The games that Darran simply couldn't live without

01 The Last Of Us (PLAYSTATION 3)
The only game that's ever made me cry. Brilliant mechanics, wonderful pacing and exceptionally strong writing. It's quite possibly the greatest game I've ever played. I've only just completed the sequel as I was worried it wouldn't live up to my high expectations.

02 Fire Emblem (GAME BOY ADVANCE)
I'm not usually a fan of Japanese RPGs but I've sunk so many hours into this game and the series in general. In fact it's the only series where I own every Western release. The writing is strong enough that you genuinely care when you lose characters in battle.

03 Magic: The Gathering Arena (PC)
I've always loved playing this but the physical version has become prohibitively expensive nowadays. I've played numerous digital versions over the years and this is easily the best (and it's free as well). I probably sink anything from thirty minutes to two hours into this every single day.

04 Thunder Force III (MEGA DRIVE)
The Mega Drive has some exceptional shooters, but this will always be the one I reach for first. The boss designs are great, the music is very good for a Mega Drive game and it has a solid range of weapons. Many prefer *Thunder Force IV*. Those people are wrong.

05 Robotron: 2084 (ARCADE)
Quite possibly the purest shooter I've ever played. I've always enjoyed Eugene's games, but few come close to the sheer adrenalin rush that *Robotron* offers. If I had the space, the money and the energy (playing it is exhausting on the arms) I'd buy a cabinet without a second thought.

06 Strider (ARCADE)
Oh come on, this was always going to make the cut. *Strider* blew me away when I first experienced it in Quay Amusements because there was nothing else quite like it at the time. Wonderful set pieces, exotic bosses and gorgeous animation made me fall in love with it. Having it on last month's cover was a special moment for me.

07 Rare Replay (XBOX ONE)
OK, I'm cheating here, but I'm the editor so it's allowed, right? I can't think of any compilation that allows you to experience multiple highlights across a company's entire career like *Rare Replay* does, as others typically focus on a specific period. It's filled with amazing extras, too. Only Digital Eclipse's excellent compilations come close.

08 Dead Space: Extraction (WII)
I love a good lightgun game, but this is one of the few examples that bolts all the shooting onto a genuinely solid story. It dovetails nicely with the original *Dead Space* (another game that doesn't get enough love) giving you better insight into the franchise's lore.

01

02
Bandit
Kent
MISS!

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04

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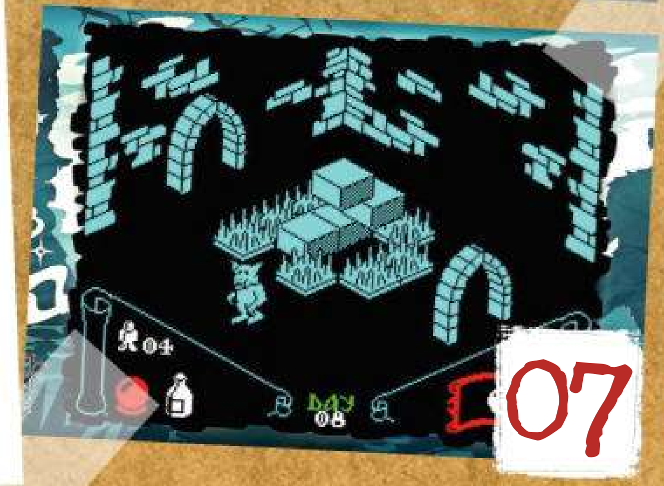
PLAYER 17650
UP-02
HI-SCORE 20000
TIME 0 58

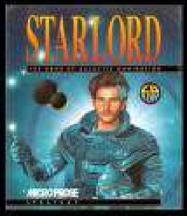

07

08

THE MAKING OF STARLORD

DISCOVER THE ORIGINS OF STARLORD, MIKE SINGLETON'S EPIC STRATEGY GAME THAT WAS OVER TEN YEARS IN THE MAKING. STARTING AS A PLAY-BY-MAIL (PBM) WARGAME, THEN REINVENTED ON THE DIAL-UP MICRONET SERVICE, BEFORE FINALLY BECOMING A COMPUTER GAME PUBLISHED BY MICROPROSE

WORDS BY RICHARD HEWISON



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** MICROPROSE (UK)

» **DEVELOPER:** MAELSTROM GAMES LTD

» **RELEASED:** 1994

» **PLATFORM:** PC, AMIGA

» **GENRE:** STRATEGY WARGAME

In the early Eighties, the late programmer and game designer, Mike Singleton, was playing an American PBM game called *Starweb*. That game ignited Mike's desire to create something similar and the result was *Starlord*, which Mike funded with royalties from his Sinclair ZX81 *Games Pack No. 1*. The *Starlord* PBM began in spring 1981 with six participants, and in July 1982, Mike gave up his teaching job to write computer games and run the PBM full-time after its popularity soared.

Games of *Starlord* ran concurrently, with up to 50 players in each. Every player began by controlling one base star, one command ship and 50 starships, in a galaxy containing a thousand random stars. Stars not controlled by real players were controlled by the Empyr, with up to ten ships assigned to each star. At the start, the position of emperor was vacant. However, hundreds of computer-controlled ships protected the throne star, and its location was only revealed when players visited a 'key star'. Other types of star provided fuel, weapons and information among other things. Player's base stars were randomly positioned throughout the galaxy, with no player starting in range of the throne star or another player.

Starlord was moderated on Mike's 32k Commodore PET computer. It took three months to write, taking many of the ideas from *Starweb* and improving them. Mike advertised *Starlord* in PBM magazines like *Flagship*, emphasising the game's features and the added incentive that new players got the rules and their first print-out for free. Mentioning that the emperor played for free until deposed helped convince others to give it a try. The *Starlord* advert offered a "regular turn-around of two weeks", and an express version where players had one week to dispatch their orders. A game turn cost £1.25, and players received a command ship status report, colour battle reports and customised sheets for sending their next orders. Mike's Integrex CX80 inkjet printer also produced a colour tactical star-map, showing player positions.

One of *Starlord*'s earliest customers was Pete Moreland, who a few years later worked on the publisher's side for many of the computer games that Mike produced over the following decade. "I used to speak on the phone to Mike's parents when he was too disorganised to process the turns!" recalls Pete fondly. Thankfully, it did not put him off the game. "In many ways I'm still trying to recapture the delights of playing *Starlord* play-by-mail today," he adds wistfully.

Mike's *Starlord* PBM made it across to North America a few years later, where it was published and moderated by Flying Buffalo Inc, the same company that ran *Starweb* and who also, confusingly, published another PBM called *Starlord* in the Seventies.

Mike planned to create a new PBM called Atlantis, but those ideas were instead incorporated into his computer strategy game *The Lords Of Midnight*, published in 1984.

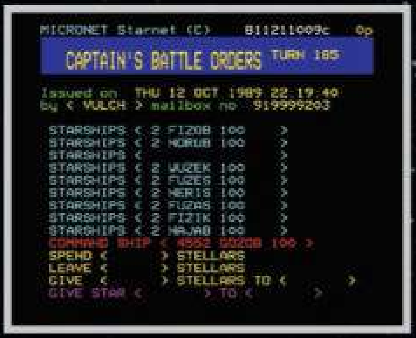
» 1991/92 Maelstrom team. Back – Andy Elkerton, Dave Gautrey, Chris Rowley, Stewart Flint. Front – George Williamson, Hugh Batterbury, Mike Singleton, Dave Ollman.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

THE LORDS OF MIDNIGHT
SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1984

THRONE OF FIRE (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC
YEAR: 1987

WAR IN MIDDLE EARTH
SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1988



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  STARSHIPS < 2 NAJAB 100     >
  COMMAND SHIP < 4552 GOZOB 100 >
  SPEND <       > STELLARS
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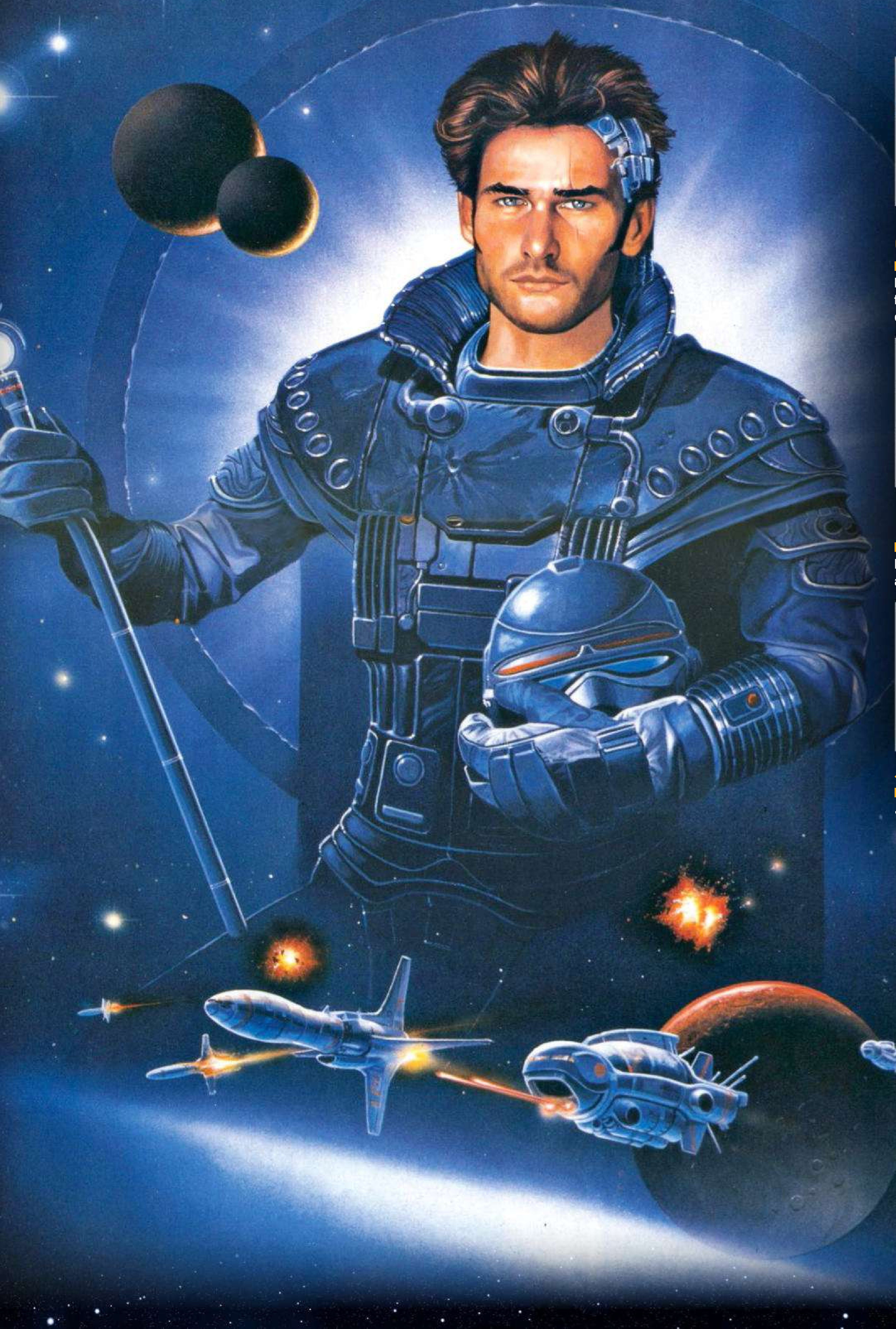
» [BBC] Commands submitted by players in *Starnet* were processed three times per week on Micronet.



DAVE GAUTREY

- Programmed an early battle simulator demo for an Atari ST version of *Starlord* in 1989.

DEAN BETTON

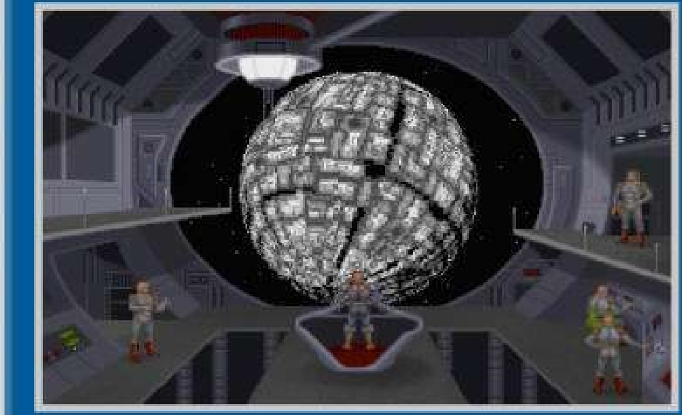
- Graphic artist for MicroProse UK who did all the art for *Starlord*.

JIM SHAW

- Programmer of *Starlord* for the Amiga.

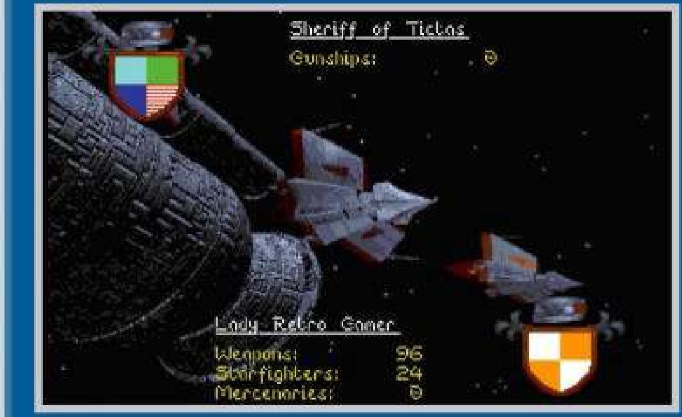
CONVERSION CAPERS

HOW STARLORD FARED ON THE AMIGA AND PC



PC

■ The PC version of *Starlord* was principally coded by Pete Barnett, but Maelstrom's workload became ridiculously congested as other games were commissioned, including *Ashes Of Empire* (Mirage), *Grimblood* (Virgin Games) and *The Ring Cycle* (Psygnosis). The Maelstrom development team was stretched thin, working on different aspects of multiple games simultaneously. Reusing code written for one game in another became commonplace.

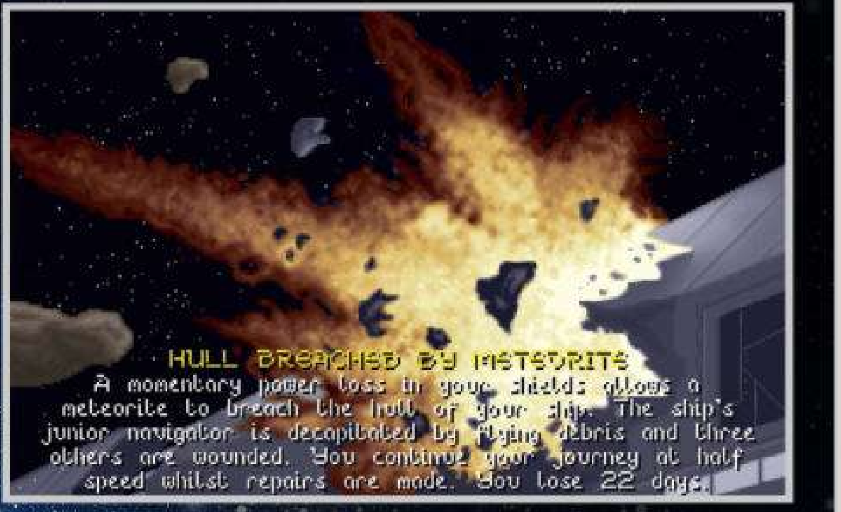


Sheriff of Ticlas
Gunships: 0

Lady Retro Gamer
Weapons: 96
Starfighters: 24
Mercenaries: 0

AMIGA

■ Amiga programmer Jim Shaw's main hurdle was the Amiga graphics libraries that PC programmer Pete Barnett provided. With Pete now absent, Jim had to resolve the issues on his own. The PC version could clear and redraw the screen far faster than an Amiga could, so Jim had to completely overhaul the Amiga graphics engine, which was a major task.

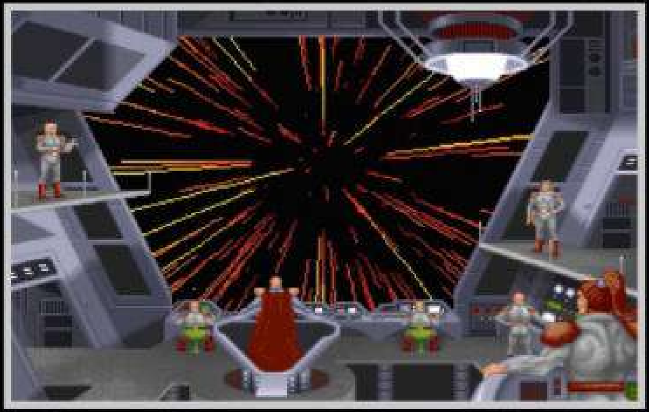


HULL BREACHED BY METEORITE
A momentary power loss in your shields allows a meteorite to breach the hull of your ship. The ship's junior navigator is decapitated by flying debris and three others are wounded. You continue your journey at half speed whilst repairs are made. You lose 22 days.

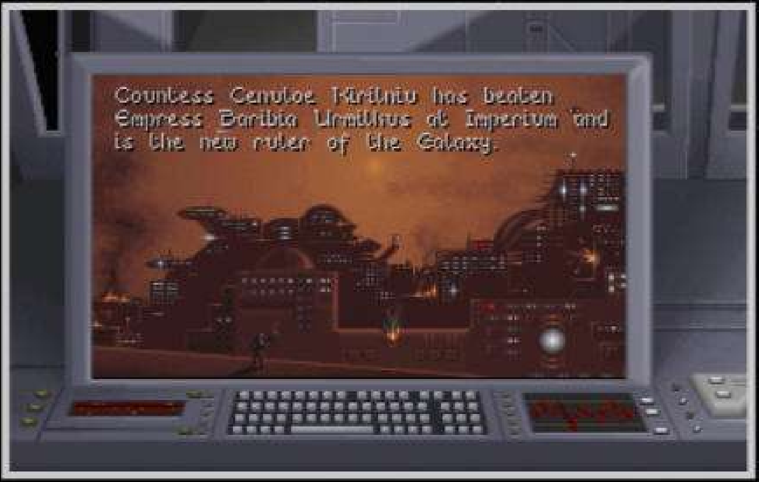
» [PC] As you travel across the galaxy, unforeseen events can slow down your progress to the Throne Star.

▶ Despite this shift away from PBMs, the general principles of *Starlord* were kept alive by Mike's *Starnet*, which ran on a BBC Micro, hosted by Micronet via the viewdata dial-up service Prestel. Using a modem, players connected to Prestel and navigated to the *Starlord* page to play. In addition to the standard Prestel subscription, *Starnet* cost 99p to join and 25p per turn. The cost was automatically added to the player's monthly bill. *Starnet*'s trial launch in early 1984 with two dozen players did not go smoothly, as Micronet's press officer Peter Probert revealed, "We did have incredible problems with *Starnet* and we had the choice of starting again from the beginning or ditching the whole thing."

It turned out that the game had difficulties that Mike Singleton did not have time to fix. Mike's code was given a thorough overhaul by *Starnet* player Lawrence Kirby, known in the game as GUDIL or GROMB, before finally relaunching in late December 1985 with new features and revised simpler rules. Game turns were processed three times per week, and thanks to the *Starlord* chatline on Micronet, players could message each other or have the occasional pub meet to discuss tactics. Players formed temporary alliances and focused their efforts on specific starships, planets or sectors.



» [PC] Jumping to other stars takes days of game time, depending on how far away your destination is.



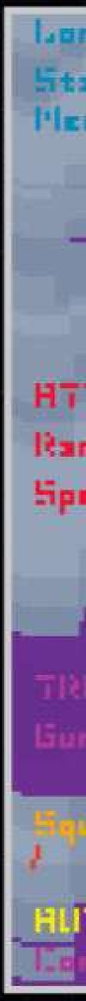
Countess Cenuloe Kirilniu has beaten Empress Baribia Urmillius of Imperium and is the new ruler of the Galaxy.

» [PC] Without support from others and control of the citadel stars, an emperor's reign is often short-lived.

Mike Singleton's passion for PBMs did not diminish. With the *Starlord* PBM retired, and *Starnet* running on Micronet, Mike began working on a new computer game called *Dark Sceptre* that would run concurrently as a PBM. Various other distractions, most notably Firebird's *Star Trek* game, meant that *Dark Sceptre* was delayed, but Mike insisted that the PBM version was finished first. *Dark Sceptre* was the first product to come from Maelstrom Games, formed specifically by Mike to manage the *Dark Sceptre* PBM, which ran off a Sinclair ZX Spectrum with Microdrives. The PBM was advertised by Maelstrom in the summer of 1986. To participate, the player needed access to a ZX Microdrive, as the turns were saved onto Microdrive cartridges.

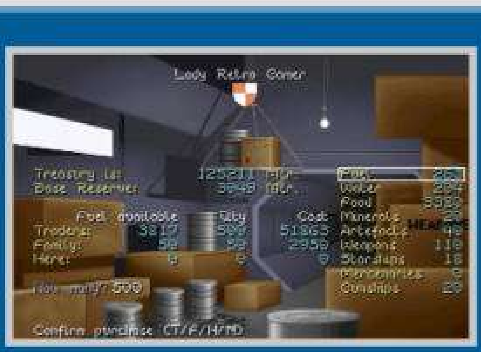
The *Dark Sceptre* PBM player would control half a dozen or so characters in a fantasy world where the player who grabbed the eponymous dark sceptre ruled the world, and others would attempt to kill them and take control themselves. The player would plan and save their next moves. They could run a separate program on the cartridge to show the possible future outcome of their decisions, prior to sending the cartridge to Maelstrom and their moves being processed and sent back by return post.

The bulk of the *Dark Sceptre* code for the PBM and the computer game was written by sub-contracted development team Consult Computer Systems, who worked on three Mike Singleton games in total, *War In Middle Earth* and *Throne*



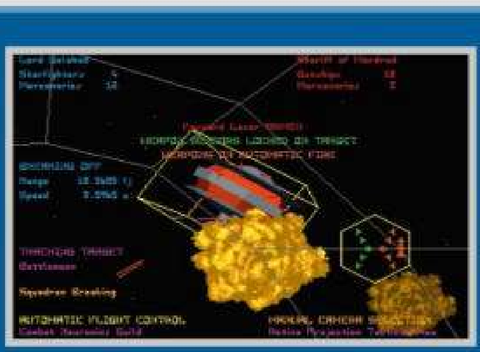
BECOMING THE EMPEROR

SIX TIPS TO MASTERING THE STARLORD GALAXY



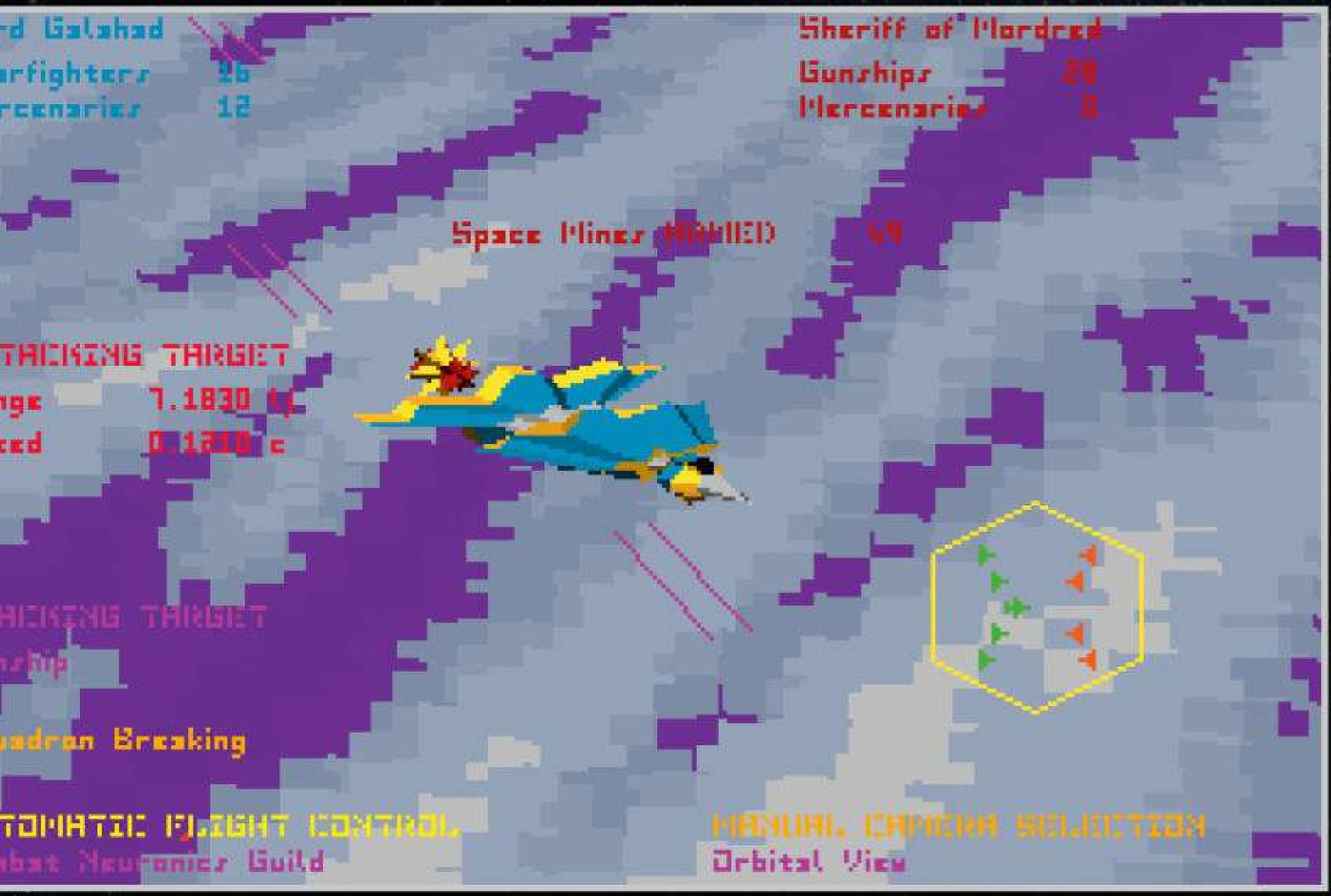
FUNDS TRANSFER

■ At the start, transfer some funds from your base star to the treasury on your capital ship. Now buy a few hundred units of fuel from the traders, using those funds. Each unit of fuel equates to a day's hyperspace travel but remember that fighting space battles also consumes fuel.



FULL BATTLES

■ When taking part in a full space battle in solid-shaded 3D, as a beginner it is worth switching off autopilot as your battlefighter swoops in to attack the enemy capital ship, then launching your weapons manually. As you become more confident, disengage the autopilot more often and take more control.

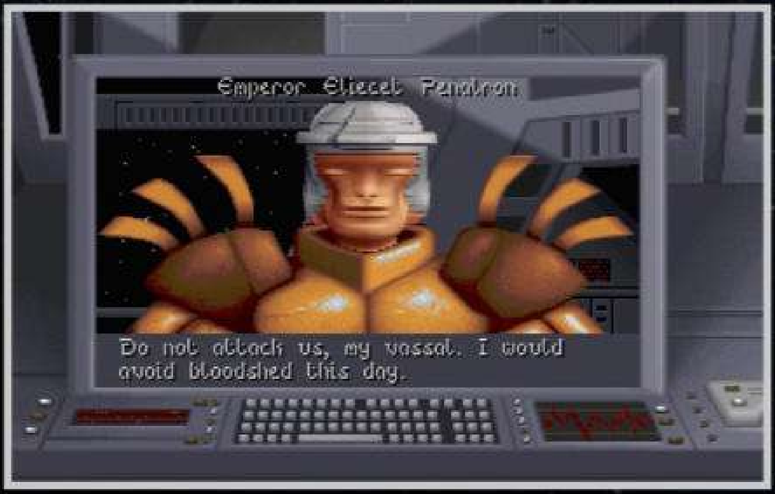


» [PC] Engaging in a full battle gives access to the solid-shade 3D where you can take direct control.

Of Fire for Melbourne House, in addition to *Dark Sceptre* for Beyond. However, as development entered the crunch period in 1987, Consult hit a creative brick wall and was struggling. Recent Maelstrom recruit Dave Gautrey and Mike Singleton ended up fixing the issues the best they could, in just a few short weeks.

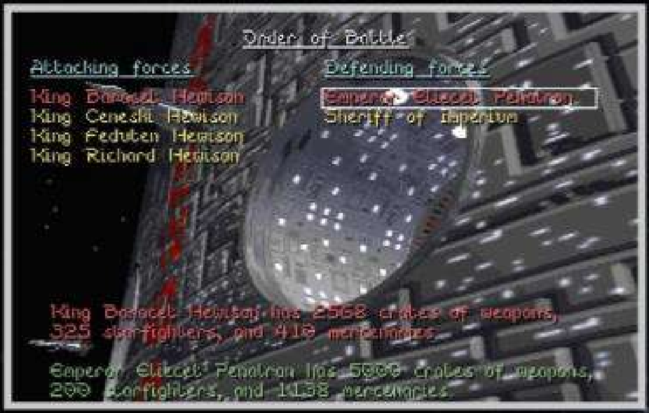
The *Dark Sceptre* PBM failed. The idea of sending a Microdrive cartridge in the post and waiting for the outcome was out-dated by the late Eighties. Running a PBM via Microdrives was a strange business decision and was doomed from the outset. The stand-alone *Dark Sceptre* game fared much better, published in late 1987 for the ZX Spectrum and Amstrad CPC by Firebird, which had purchased Beyond in late 1985. In contrast, the PBM version run by Maelstrom Games was quickly forgotten.

Throne Of Fire and *War In Middle Earth* were Mike's 8-bit swansong. *Whirligig*, published by Firebird, was Maelstrom's first attempt at producing solid-shaded 3D on 16-bit computers. It was a technical exercise that produced a strange, unsatisfying arcade game. However, by the time *Whirligig* was underway, Mike had turned Maelstrom Games into a full-on software development team, recruiting several programmers, artists and musicians.



Do not attack us, my vassal. I would avoid bloodshed this day.

» [PC] When you are strong enough to take on the emperor, do not hesitate to use the might of your fleet.



» [PC] The emperor and his sheriff are all that stand between you and victory!

Maelstrom's next two productions were a hugely ambitious solid-shaded 3D strategic game called *Midwinter* and the other was a space-based strategy game called… *Starlord*.

Mike Singleton's detailed *Starlord* specification document included many of the original PBM concepts and then expanded on them. Forming alliances through marriage, becoming leader of a religious cult, declaring religious wars… they were all in there. The aim, as it was with the previous *Starlord* and *Starnet* games, was to gain control of the throne star and become emperor. The specification hinted at winning strategies, so if the player could locate and control four data stars, they could tap into enemy computer systems and download their military strategies prior to a battle. They could then run them in a simulator and replay the battle until they devised a winning strategy.

Midwinter and *Starlord* were signed by MicroProse (UK) and Telecom Soft respectively, but when MicroProse purchased Telecom Soft in May 1989, Maelstrom was happy to unify under one publisher. Development on *Starlord* began on the Atari ST. Programmer Dave Gautrey created the strategic computer simulator, which displayed the galaxy and the stars within. The player's spaceships, represented by arrows, followed orbital paths based upon a series of predefined orders. If an enemy ship got close then the spaceship would attack the nearest target, before turning back to its original orders, all driven by a programming language of simple commands, all icon driven.

BASE STAR PRODUCTIVITY

Having your base star making a profit is important whilst you are away expanding your influence elsewhere. Constantly check your base star and ensure it has not run out of the resources it needs to be productive. The handbook supplied with the game explains what each production star type needs.

FRIEND OR FOE?

Keep an eye on the Library, where you can see the current state of the Starlord hierarchies spread across the galaxy. Note who is friendly, neutral or an enemy to your family, then check who is in residence on the star system you wish to visit next. As the saying goes: forewarned is forearmed.

The enemy of my friend is my enemy. Defend yourself!

REMEMBER YOUR ALLIES

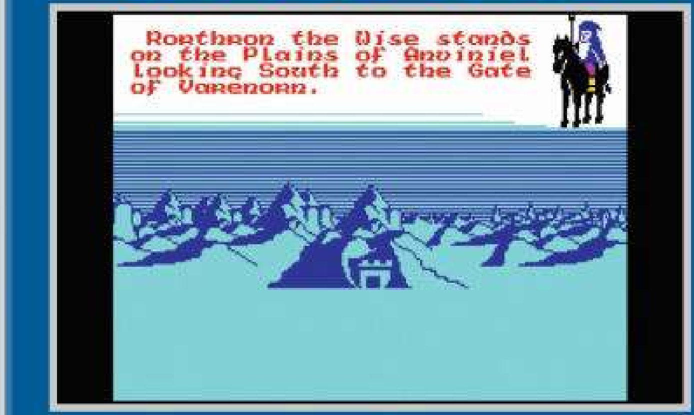
Making pacts with other families in the galaxy can help your cause for total domination, and sometimes you will be needed to help them in a battle when they are under siege from others. Whilst you cannot betray your own family, you can decide to turn on an ally later.

OCCUPATIONAL HAZARDS

It is easy to attack and occupy an undefended star, then wait for the owner to return and battle them to take full control. However, if you do not want control of that star, just take the opportunity to ransack the star's resources and then leave before the owner comes back.

MAGIC MIKE

CLASSIC MIKE SINGLETON GAMES YOU MUST EXPERIENCE

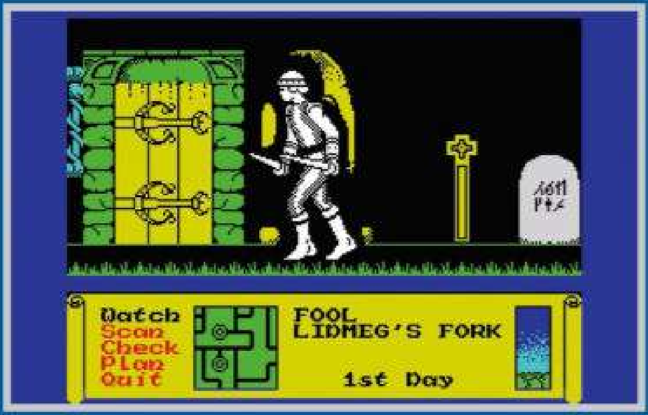


Rorthron the Wise stands on the Plains of Anviniel Looking South to the Gate of Varenorn.

DOOMDARK'S REVENGE

SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC, COMMODORE 64
YEAR: 1985

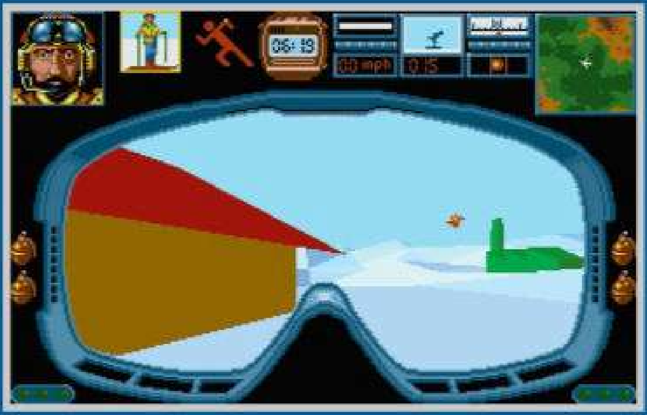
■ Mike Singleton had his trilogy of *Midnight* games planned from day one, and work began on *Doomdark's Revenge* the moment the original *Lords Of Midnight* was finished. *Doomdark* featured more map locations, more armies and a different climate. It also featured underground passages and other races including giants and barbarians.



DARK SCEPTRE

SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC
YEAR: 1987

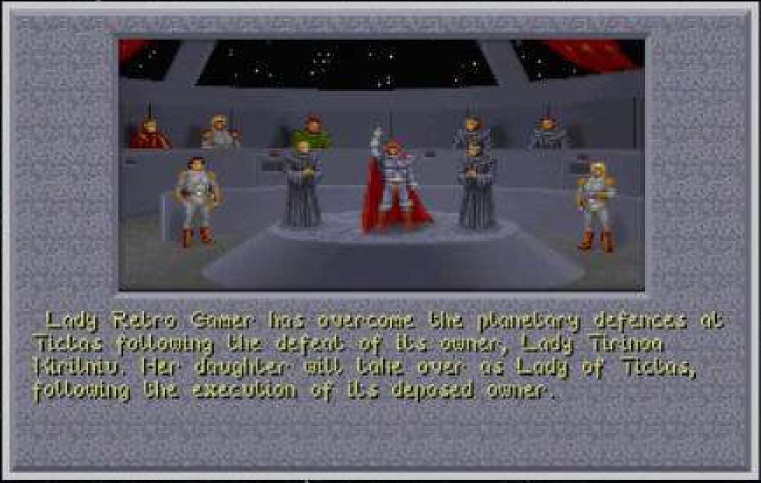
■ *Dark Sceptre* featured large, animated figures that strode purposefully across the Spectrum or Amstrad CPC's screen. The quest was to defeat the Northern Lords Of The Shadow, gripped by evil and ruled by the Dark Sceptre that created them. Find and destroy the sceptre, and the land would be free.



MIDWINTER

SYSTEM: ATARI ST, COMMODORE AMIGA, IBM PC
YEAR: 1989

■ *Midwinter* was an impressive futuristic strategy game played out in 3D, set in a snowy world, full of espionage, gadgets and a plethora of different forms of transport, including skiing, hang-gliding, snow buggies and cable cars. As with most other Mike Singleton games, recruiting other characters was essential to winning.



Lady Retro Gamer has overcome the planetary defences at Ticbas following the defeat of its owner, Lady Tirinoa Kirilniu. Her daughter will take over as Lady of Ticbas, following the execution of its deposed owner.

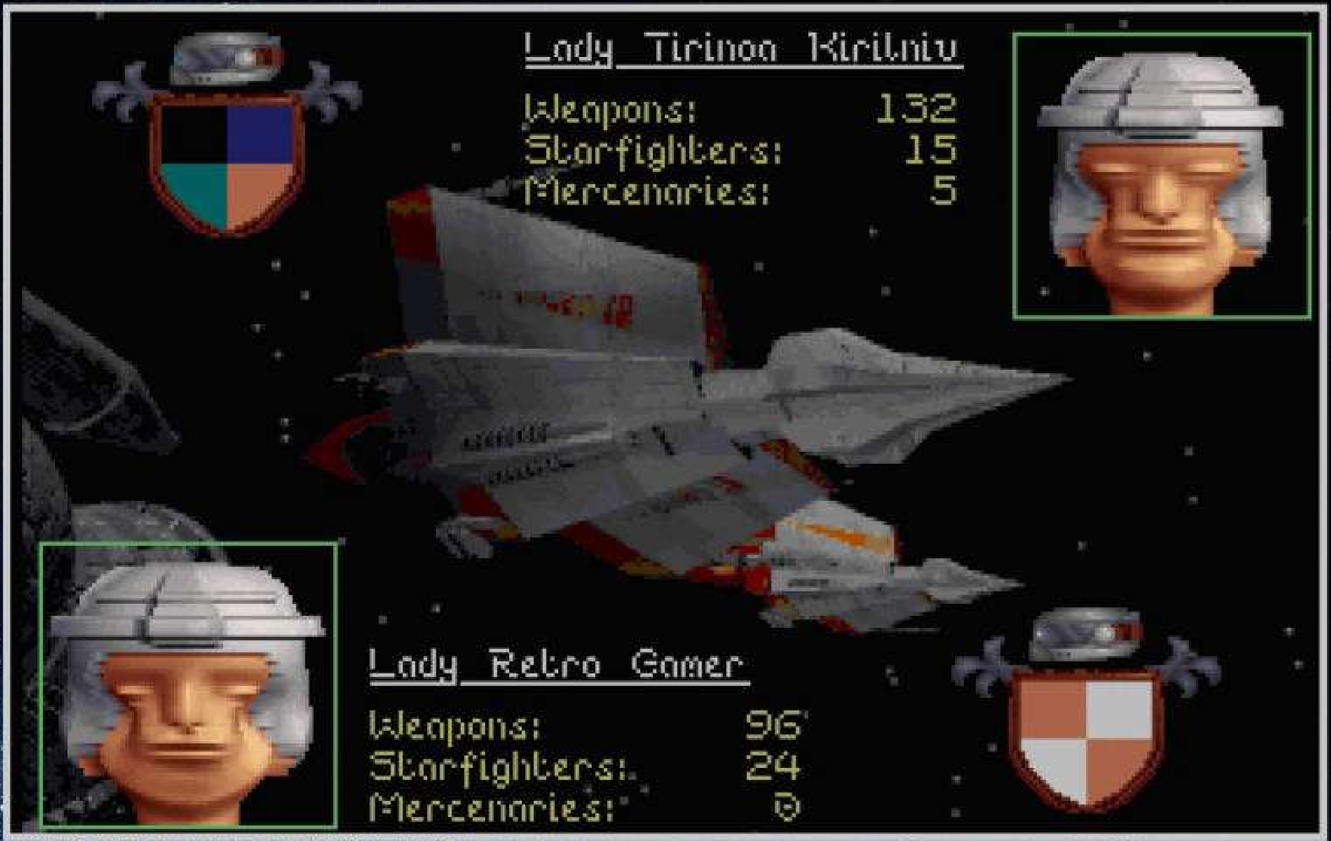
» [PC] Your first victory in Dynasty mode gives you the chance to place a family member in charge of the star.

MicroProse announced *Starlord* in late 1989, when off-screen photos of the strategic computer simulator appeared in a few magazines, along with a press release that mentioned "… over 65,000 different galaxies, 1,000 star systems and 5,000 planets of various types, within each galaxy, as well as individual control of up to 250,000 ships held within 1,000 battle groups…".

Despite the failure of his *Dark Sceptre* PBM, Mike Singleton remained keen on the concept of players sending moves in the post. The idea for the *Starlord* computer game was that players would run the strategic computer simulator, form their strategies and post them on disk to their opponent, who would import them and then run the simulator to produce the outcome. Another Maelstrom programmer, Chris Pink, recalls why that feature never made it into the final game, "Just before I left Maelstrom, I calculated that the data needed to be saved after a couple of turns was around a dozen or so floppy disks!"

Mike Singleton's designs were always ambitious, and it was his creativity and technical problem solving that made working at Maelstrom a fun challenge for many of the programmers. However, there was a fair amount of staff turn-over, and that had a catastrophic effect on the early work put into *Starlord*, as Dave Gautrey recalls, "That development ended when some people left Maelstrom who had been working on *Midwinter*. We scrapped 90% of the *Midwinter* code and started afresh, and that meant *Starlord* was put on a very high shelf."

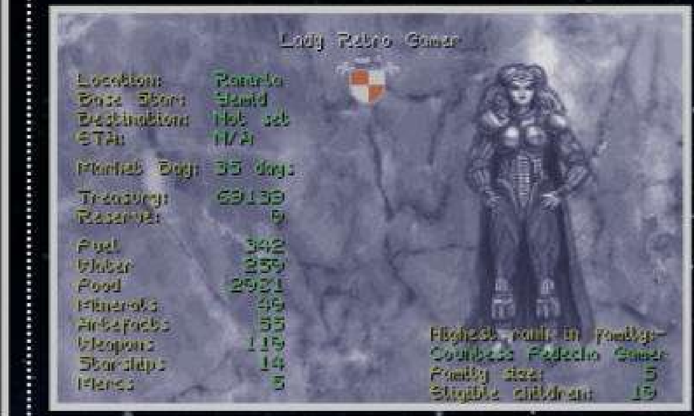
Maelstrom's profile skyrocketed when *Midwinter* became a huge hit, prompting work to begin on a sequel. Development eventually returned to *Starlord* in early 1993 but the previous battle simulator code was abandoned. George Williamson picks up the story, "We were just starting to code in C. It was all assembler



Lady Tirinoa Kirilniu
Weapons: 132
Starfighters: 15
Mercenaries: 5

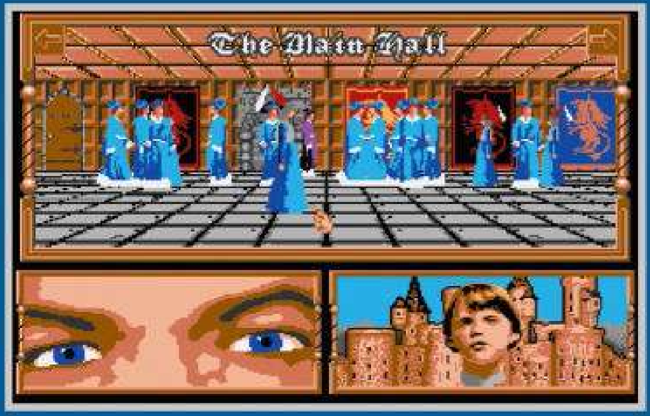
Lady Retro Gamer
Weapons: 96
Starfighters: 24
Mercenaries: 0

» [PC] The battle lines are drawn, and the opponent's resources are compared before the skirmish begins.



Lady Retro Gamer
Location: [illegible]
Base Star: [illegible]
Destination: Not set
ETA: N/A
Market Day: 35 days
Treasury: 63133
Reserve: 6
Fuel 342
Water 259
Food 2921
Minerals 49
Artefacts 55
Weapons 119
Starships 14
Mercs 5
Highest rank in family–
Countess [illegible] Gamer
Family size: 5
Eligible children: 15

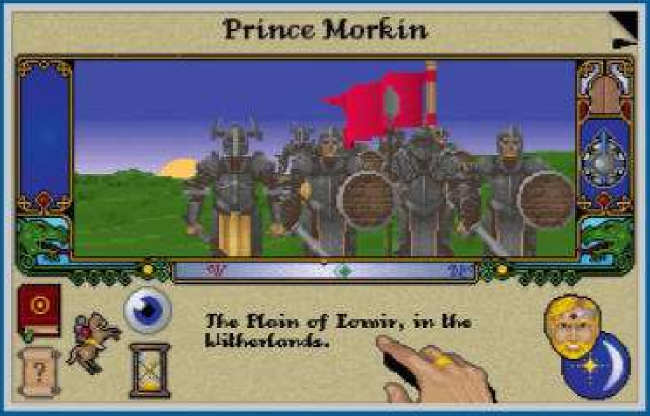
» [PC] If you choose the In The Beginning scenario as a lord or lady, you have very little standing in the galaxy.



GRIMBLOOD

SYSTEM: COMMODORE AMIGA, IBM PC
YEAR: 1990

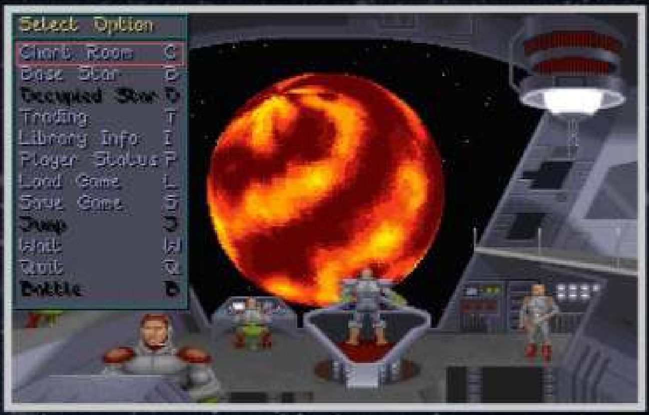
■ Although it might not look as impressive as Mike's previous games, *Grimblood* was a valiant attempt to produce something different. The game was a murder mystery, set in a castle with a hoard of independent characters. At a basic level, *Grimblood* was similar in concept to the board game *Cluedo*.



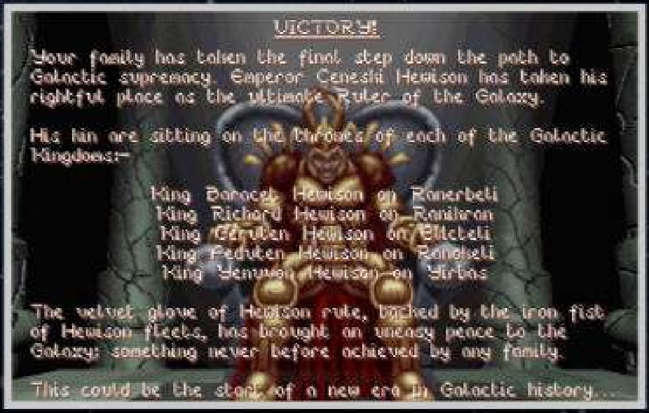
LORDS OF MIDNIGHT: THE CITADEL

SYSTEM: IBM PC
YEAR: 1995

■ After a hiatus of over ten years, Mike Singleton returned to the land of *Midnight*, but not as originally intended. Ideas from the unrealised third part of the series, *Eye Of The Moon*, were instead added to *The Citadel*, using the 3D that Maelstrom had developed for its other titles.



» [PC] The Duchess's capital ship bridge is awaiting your orders. As your rank improves, the view of the bridge changes.



VICTORY!

Your family has taken the final step down the path to Galactic supremacy. Emperor Ceneshi Hewison has taken his rightful place as the ultimate Ruler of the Galaxy.

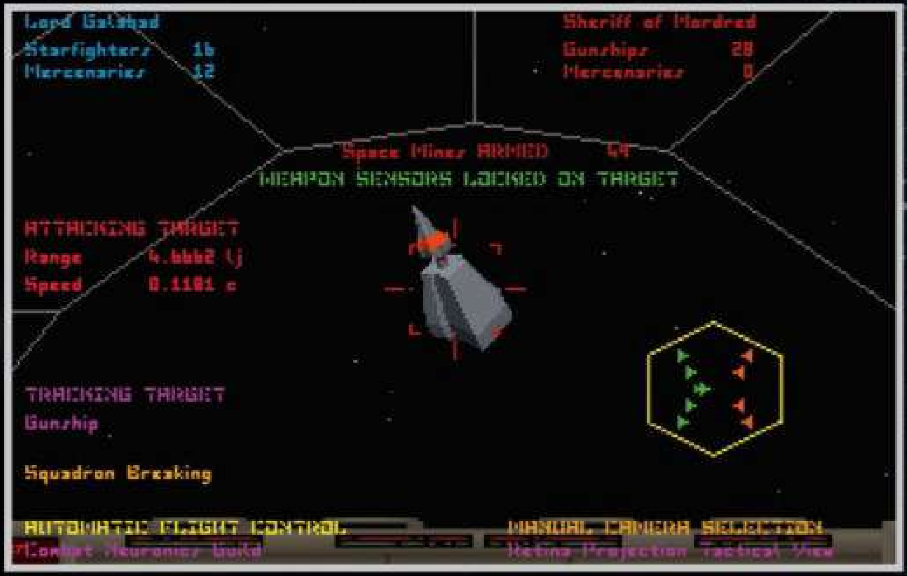
His kin are sitting on the thrones of each of the Galactic Kingdoms:-

King Barocel Hewison on Ronerbeli
King Richard Hewison on Ranilron
King Geruten Hewison on Elkteli
King Feduten Hewison on Ronokeli
King Yemuon Hewison on Sirbas

The velvet glove of Hewison rule, backed by the iron fist of Hewison fleets, has brought an uneasy peace to the Galaxy: something never before achieved by any family.

This could be the start of a new era in Galactic history...

» [PC] To survive as emperor, the player needs kings or queens installed on all four Citadel Stars before attacking Imperium.



» [PC] There are 19 different types of spaceship encountered in *Starlord*. The gunship is the smallest.

before that and I had Singo [Mike Singleton] sat next to me while we ported his prototype head-generation code from Atari ST Basic/Assembler into C. I was talking him through the basics, showing him how to compile and link stuff. A few days later he was a C programmer!"

Dean Betton, resident graphic artist at MicroProse in Chipping Sodbury, Avon, was the sole artist on *Starlord*, working his way through loading screens, selection screens, cockpits and all the different environments in the game. "I visited Mike's house and he showed us the current demo. They had created a vast game and needed someone to visualise it. Not only had he created the galaxy, but he had an intelligent alien-empire generator that at the time was just a head, generated with characteristics and genetics that, as the player went through the game, would continue to develop. It was fascinating and groundbreaking, and I felt honoured to create the artwork."

The genetics and head generation were interesting concepts, but what it produced were rather weird-looking faces that, in hindsight, would have been better hand-drawn by the artist. However, the genetics in *Starlord* were not just about appearances. They also affected family traits such as bravery, trading prowess and so on. It was all quite subtle, but by analysing which families were more easily subjugated, the player could formulate a successful strategy.

In late 1993, programmer Jim Shaw joined Maelstrom, and began working on the Amiga version. Pete Barnett was still working on the PC version when Jim arrived. It was close to being finished but the game was too hard and progress through the ranks was a grind. The solid-shaded 3D battles and the hex-map battle grid coded by Mike Singleton, and the planet and talking heads code by Mike and George Williamson were all finished and looked very impressive, but MicroProse thought the 3D engine was slow. Maelstrom sent the source code, but MicroProse's in-house programmers were unable to improve the performance. On low-end PCs, the battle sequences struggled and so the minimum recommended CPU was upped to a 386.

Starlord was written using Borland C, and PC programmer Pete Barnett used his own graphics libraries. He had equivalent Amiga libraries prepared, and the plan for the Amiga port was to compile the C code along with the Amiga libraries, use Dave Gautrey's existing *Ashes Of Empire* 3D engine for the battle section, rewrite the hex-map code and then add the music. Using his faithful Amiga A500 and a 20Mb hard disk, Jim Shaw started work. However, soon after Pete made his final improvements to the PC version, he left Maelstrom.

MicroProse duly published the PC version in its usual lavish big-box packaging in early 1994, leaving Jim Shaw to write the Amiga conversion, adjusting the hex-map code for 68000, only using the original 386 code as a template. "The next monster job was getting the C code to compile and run. It was painful on the A500 and took forever! MicroProse eventually loaned us an A4000 which significantly helped," explains Jim. He was then faced with another technical problem. "Sadly, although the heads and rotating planet code was available, I wasn't able to use either as they took up too much memory, and Paul Rowbotham's music was reduced from 500K to 75K!" Various other technical challenges included radically improving the performance of the star map with help from Dave Gautrey and getting the game to run as a native Amiga application. Jim had to employ some sneaky ROM kernel tricks to resolve that problem. Jim's Amiga port took four months to write, and was released in late-1994.

Starlord was an ambitious game that had huge potential. The 3D battles looked impressive when run on a suitably powerful computer, but they turned out to be impractical to play, and so were usually bypassed entirely by going for the 'Quick Result'. The original game specification was constantly diluted during development, but there was still enough strategy to make it an engaging challenge. However, it bore little resemblance to the outrageous numbers claimed in the MicroProse press release from three years earlier, and upon release, the game received fair to lukewarm reviews in the magazines, which did not reflect the amount of hard work that had gone into producing it. ✱

THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home

TECHNO DRIVE

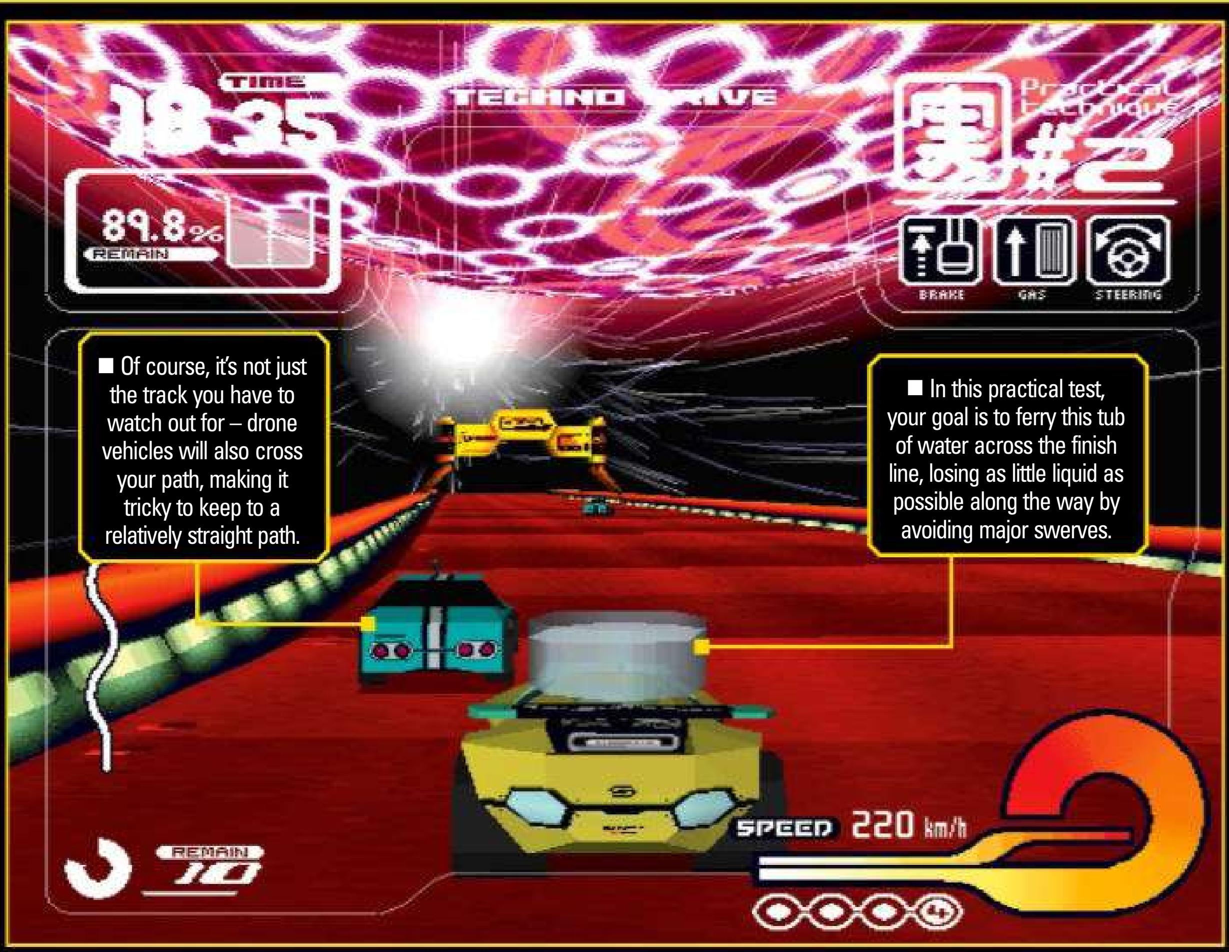
DEVELOPER: **NAMCO** YEAR: **1998** GENRE: **DRIVING**

■ **As far as we can tell, driving tests are something that people do purely because they have to – we've never heard anyone talk about how their days as a learner were the best times they've ever had in a car.** So it seems bizarre that Namco would choose to release an arcade driving game in which the usual thrills of overtaking your rivals and outrunning the clock are set aside, in favour of brief tests of your driving skill. Of course, Namco's status as a major force in arcades is not for nothing, and *Techno Drive* manages to successfully wring fun out of a concept that sounds fairly dry on paper.

Techno Drive requires players to complete challenges across three disciplines – steering, footwork and practical technique tests. Steering challenges don't use the pedals, and require you to perform tasks like avoiding other cars, dribbling a ball or staying within the cones. Footwork tests disable the steering wheel and focus on your mastery of the pedals, for example by challenging you to hit a small target by launching off a ramp at 150km/h. As you'd expect, the practical technique events use both the wheel and pedals.

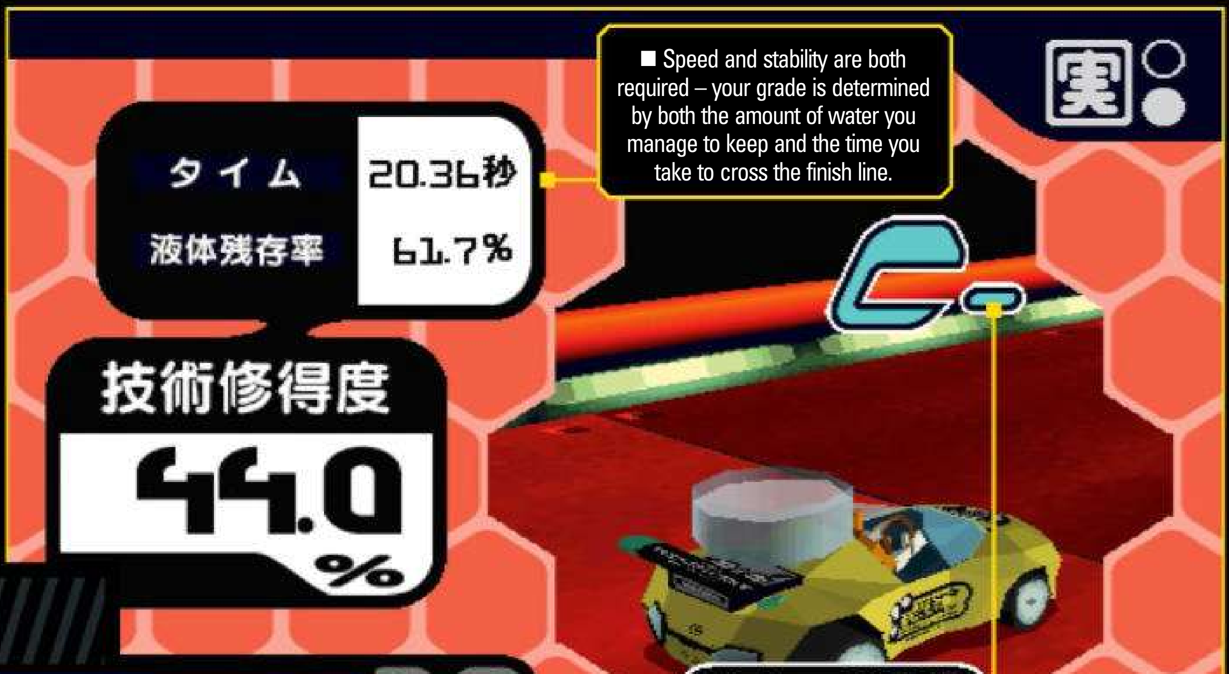
What makes *Techno Drive* so enjoyable is the brevity of the experience – each of the events lasts for a relatively short time, and you only play three before you're given an overall grade based on your performance. Additionally, the game is extremely well presented, with some enjoyable electronic music backing up the action and a unique visual style. Even the menus look great, exhibiting futuristic design sensibilities that would come to be known as the Y2K aesthetic.

However, it's no great surprise that this game didn't come home. This kind of game is far too brief and limited to have made for a satisfying console release in the late Nineties – after all, the licence tests were just the boring bits of *Gran Turismo*, although to be fair those tests were never as exciting as *Techno Drive*'s challenges. Still, it's a shame that it hasn't been converted since, as it could make for a fun little downloadable game.



■ Of course, it's not just the track you have to watch out for – drone vehicles will also cross your path, making it tricky to keep to a relatively straight path.

■ In this practical test, your goal is to ferry this tub of water across the finish line, losing as little liquid as possible along the way by avoiding major swerves.



■ Speed and stability are both required – your grade is determined by both the amount of water you manage to keep and the time you take to cross the finish line.

■ A letter grade is assigned after each event based on your performance, with the average of your scores across all three disciplines combining to determine your final score.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

CRAZY TAXI

1999

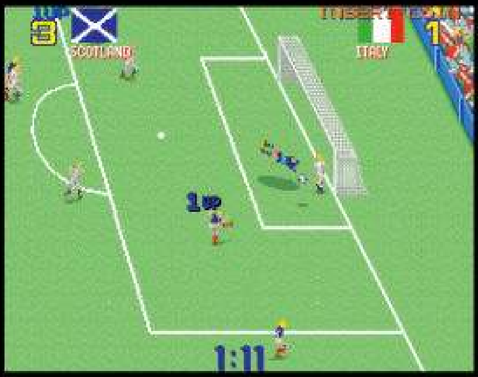
■ Curiously, it's only the home version of *Crazy Taxi* that has any similarity to *Techno Drive*, thanks to the added Crazy Box challenges – the main arcade gameplay is totally different. It's available on various digital platforms, but get it on Dreamcast, PS2 or GameCube for the proper licensed soundtrack.

PREMIER SOCCER

DEVELOPER: **KONAMI** **YEAR:** **1993** **GENRE:** **SPORTS**

■ **Konami's attempt to bring football action to the arcade gamer has one of the stranger options we've seen in an arcade sports game – four different levels of camera zoom, chosen at the start of the game.** The game doesn't seem to be scaling the graphics on the fly, so did the artists really have to draw everything four times? It's an extraordinary amount of effort for a game that, if we're honest, barely looks any better than a Mega Drive football game of the same era.

With all that having been said, don't let the underwhelming visuals fool you. *Premier Soccer* is a very competent arcade football game, with speedy action and little refereeing nonsense to get in the way. Passing is a tad more magnetic than we might like, but there's still a good bit of timing involved in getting the receiving player to execute a spectacular overhead kick correctly. The game only offers international teams and knockout cup competition, but that's to be expected of an arcade football game. If you've tried out the likes of *Super Sidekicks* and *Hat Trick Hero* and still been left wanting, this modest looking game might well be the alternative you're after.



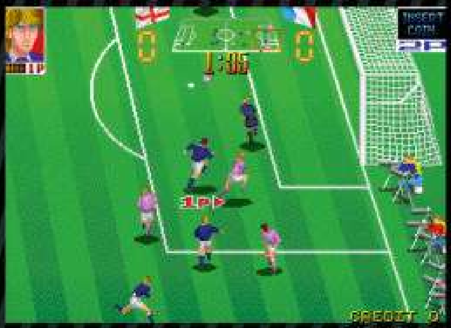
» [Arcade] Here's the far view, showing Scotland putting a fourth past Italy. We can dream, right?

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

EURO FOOTBALL CHAMP

1990

■ This was an early entry in Taito's *Hat Trick Hero* series of football games, and ended up being converted to a number of home platforms by Domark – Atari ST, Amiga and Commodore 64 versions all saw release as *European Football Champ*. Taito's own SNES conversion retained the shorter original name.

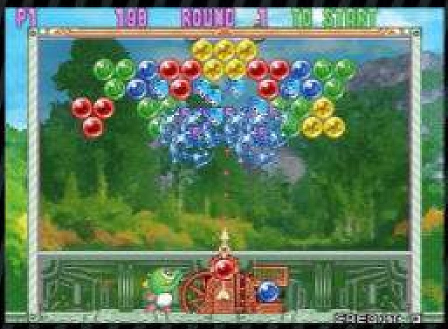


CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

BUST-A-MOVE 3 DX

1997

■ As we noted, *Bust-A-Move 3* is the closest version to *Azumanga Daioh Puzzle Bobble*. The game came to Saturn as *Bust-A-Move 3*, and to PlayStation, N64, PC and Game Boy as *Bust-A-Move 3 DX*. All of these versions can be acquired pretty cheaply today, so take your pick.



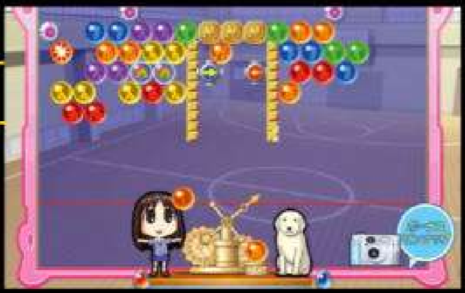
AZUMANGA DAIOH PUZZLE BOBBLE

DEVELOPER: **MOSS** **YEAR:** **2002**
GENRE: **PUZZLE**

■ **What do you get if you take the 'Bobble' out of *Puzzle Bobble*?** Well, with the *Bubble Bobble* theme removed, Taito could put anything in there – and in this case, it chose *Azumanga Daioh*. This high-school comedy comic by Kiyohiko Azuma was later given a TV adaptation, and you'll probably remember it if you were a fan of anime and manga around the turn of the century, as it was popular both in Japan and internationally.

Beyond the addition of Osaka, Chiyo and the gang, the game is very similar to *Puzzle Bobble 3*. Colour-changing rainbow bubbles are present and you can bounce your bubbles off the ceiling as well as the walls, but the pulleys and chain reactions of *Puzzle Bobble 4* are mercifully absent. As well as standard versus play, the game offers the puzzle mode, which rewards players with character art for meeting targets in regular and bonus stages.

It's a decent puzzle game, and fans of *Azumanga Daioh* will get a kick out of seeing their favourites on-screen. For non-fans, it's nothing to go out of your way to see, especially if you've played previous *Puzzle Bobble* games.



» [Arcade] Your bubble shooter can be moved in this stage by hitting the left and right arrow bubbles.

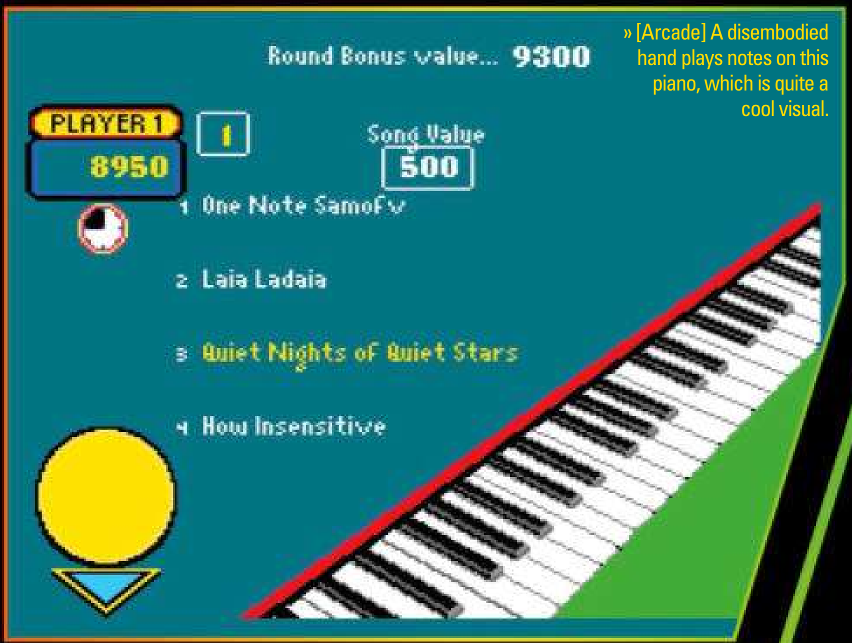
BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

NAME THAT TUNE

DEVELOPER: **BALLY SENTE** **YEAR:** **1986** **GENRE:** **QUIZ**

■ **Most of you will surely be familiar with *Name That Tune*, a game show staple that challenges its players to quickly recognise famous songs.** In the mid-Eighties, Bally Sente had the idea to adapt this for the arcade, which wasn't an awful idea at all – it's a bit more pub quiz machine than traditional videogame, but there's definitely a place for that sort of stuff in the market.

Two major problems blight the game. One is that putting an audio recognition game in any coin-op environment comes with certain challenges – namely, the tendency for other machines and people to make a lot of noise. The second is that rather than using clips of the original recordings, *Name That Tune* plays synthesised versions that further hamper your ability to recognise the songs being played. In today's environment, a connected machine with the ability to play proper clips and regularly download new ones could deliver on the unrealised potential of Bally Sente's mid-Eighties attempt and make some decent money in bars.



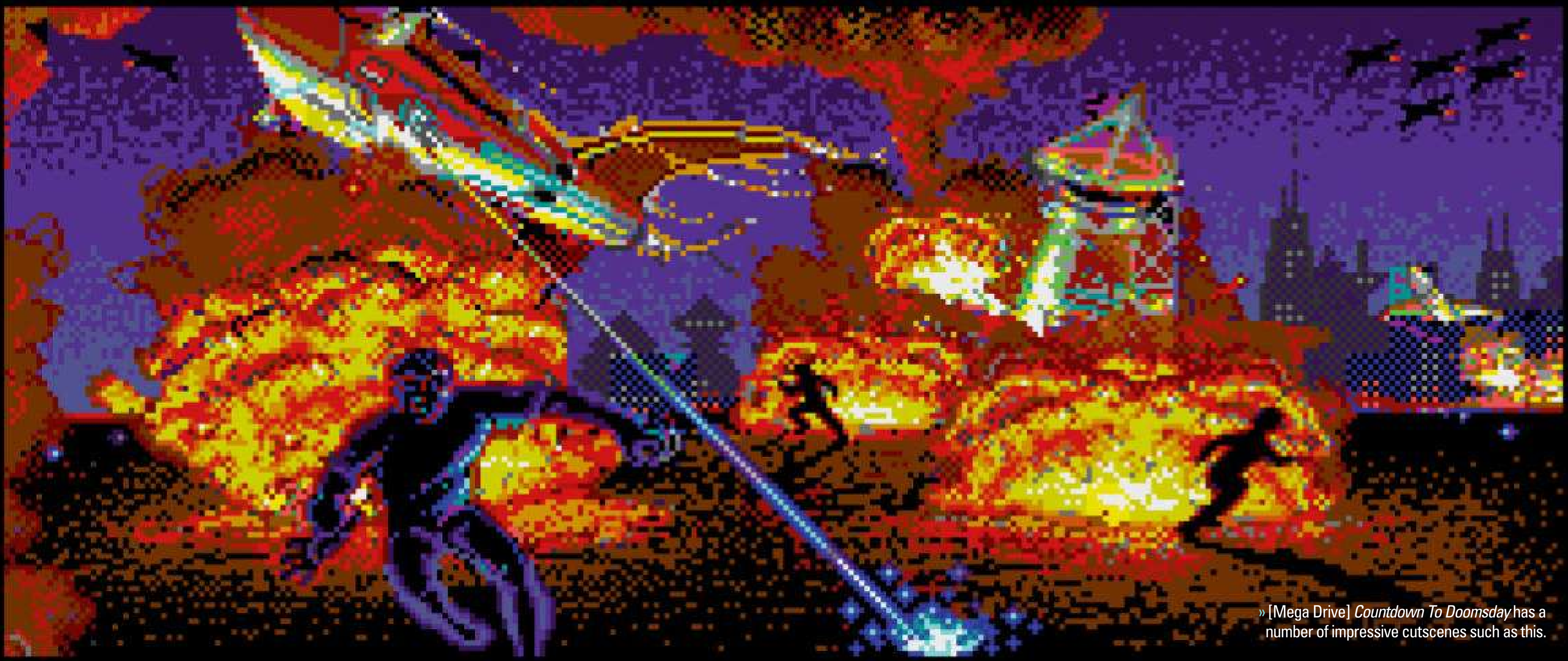
» [Arcade] A disembodied hand plays notes on this piano, which is quite a cool visual.

ULTIMATE GUIDE

GROUND VEHICLE

THE 25TH CENTURY BUCK ROGERS

COUNTDOWN TO DOOMSDAY



» [Mega Drive] *Countdown To Doomsday* has a number of impressive cutscenes such as this.

THE 25TH CENTURY IS A HAZARDOUS PLACE – FORTUNATELY THERE ARE HEROES SUCH AS BUCK ROGERS, A PILOT FROM ANOTHER TIME, WHO IS TAKING THE FIGHT TO THE NEFARIOUS RAM CORPORATION. TEAM UP WITH THE LEGENDARY SPACE ADVENTURER IN RETRO GAMER'S GUIDE TO THIS EPIC MEGA DRIVE SCI-FI RPG FROM THE MASTERS OF THE GENRE, SSI

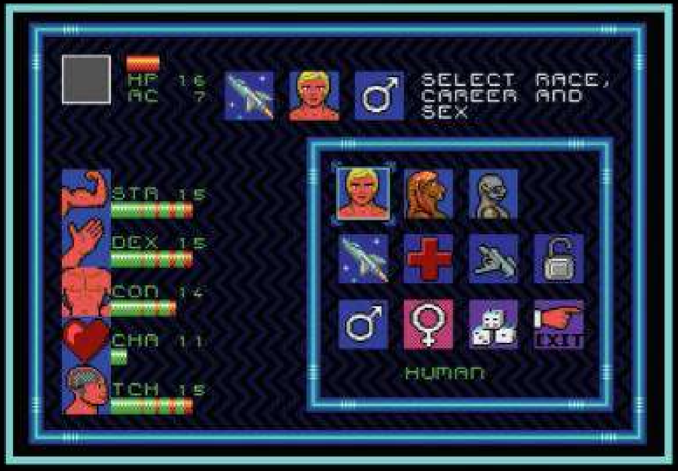
WORDS BY GRAEME MASON

The world of *Buck Rogers: Countdown To Doomsday* is one that's forged in war and nuclear fire, dating back to the end of the 20th Century. In 1995, when Soviet remnants launch a new deadly tactical missile system, it compels the Americans to send ace pilot Buck Rogers into space to destroy it. The system is annihilated, along with Buck's plane, and our legendary hero is frozen in space, awaiting discovery 500 years later. In a way, Buck could be considered to be the luckiest man on Earth: understandably upset at the destruction of their new-fangled missile platform, the Soviets unleash a nuclear strike at the USA and in the ensuing war, much of the planet is shattered into radioactive fragments. Aghast at the devastation, the world's governments unilaterally disarm, and power begins to shift to the vast corporations that have no such qualms about causing death and destruction in pursuit of their aims.

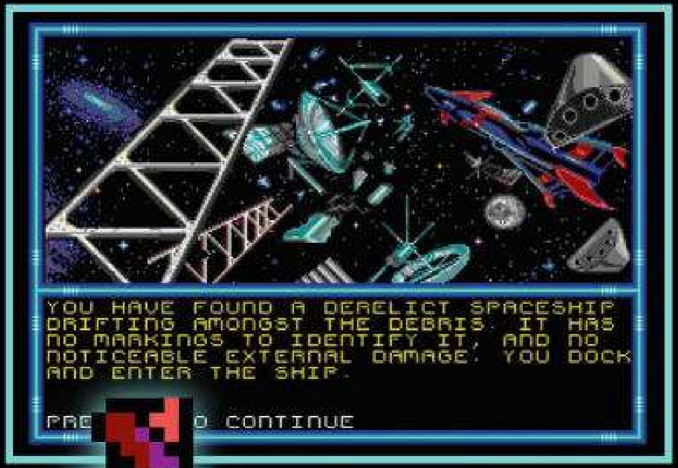
By 2456, Earth is dominated by one such corporation, the Russo-American Mercantile – RAM. Using biologically engineered soldiers, this company enforces a cruel rule until a group of rebels, the New Earth Organisation (NEO) enlist a recently thawed Buck Rogers to help it take back the planet. Earth is now free, and there is new hope. NEO's ranks are

> "SIX FRESH RECRUITS ARE READY – IT'S TIME TO JET OFF AND TAKE THE NOBLE FIGHT TO RAM"

LARGE GENNIE



» [Mega Drive] The streamlined character generation screen.



YOU HAVE FOUND A DERELICT SPACESHIP DRIFTING AMONGST THE DEBRIS. IT HAS NO MARKINGS TO IDENTIFY IT, AND NO NOTICEABLE EXTERNAL DAMAGE. YOU DOCK AND ENTER THE SHIP.

PRE O CONTINUE

» [Mega Drive] The first mission is to investigate the Marie Celeste in space.

COMBAT GENNIE

DEAD MERCURIAN WARRIOR

swelling as people sign up, eager to helpke a difference. Six fresh recruits are ready – it's time to jet off and take the noble fight to RAM.

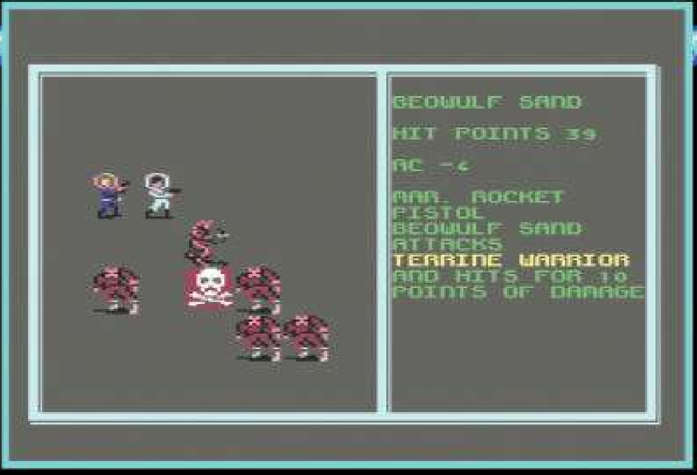
Originally released on home computers in 1990 by developer SSI and publisher Electronic Arts, 2021 marks the 30th anniversary of one of the Sega Mega Drive's most interesting RPGs. After a short cutscene where the Earth is threatened by the deadly Doomsday Laser, the player assembles their team, and there are four different classes to choose from: warriors and medics are self-explanatory, while rocket jocks have the piloting skills and rogues provide the light-fingered antics. There are also three races and each comes with its own special modifiers. Humans are all-rounders and capable of adapting to all skills and classes, while desert runners and tinkers are best deployed as rocket jocks and medics respectively. Each character can be assigned skills and an even combination of these throughout the party is the best way of succeeding in your mission. It's up to the player to decide which team member specialises in which proficiency,

CONVERSION CAPERS

TAKE TO THE STARS AS RETRO GAMER LOOKS AT ALL THE VERSIONS OF COUNTDOWN TO DOOMSDAY

COMMODORE 64

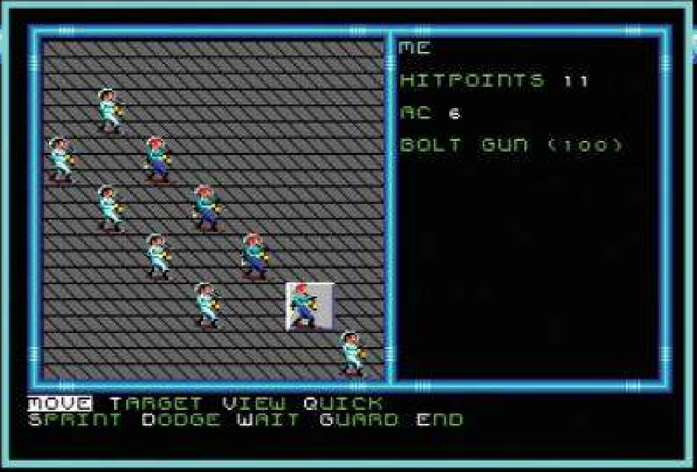
With a first-person navigation display (akin to many of its peers such as *The Bard's Tale*), the Commodore 64 version looks and plays different to the Mega Drive game. There's a host of additional characters and options to explore, and while the overall plot is similar, there's a great deal more variety and description. One of the best RPGs on the 8-bit computer.



BEOWULF SAND
HIT POINTS 39
AC -4
MAR. ROCKET PISTOL
BEOWULF SAND ATTACKS TERRINE WARRIOR AND HITS FOR 10 POINTS OF DAMAGE

AMIGA

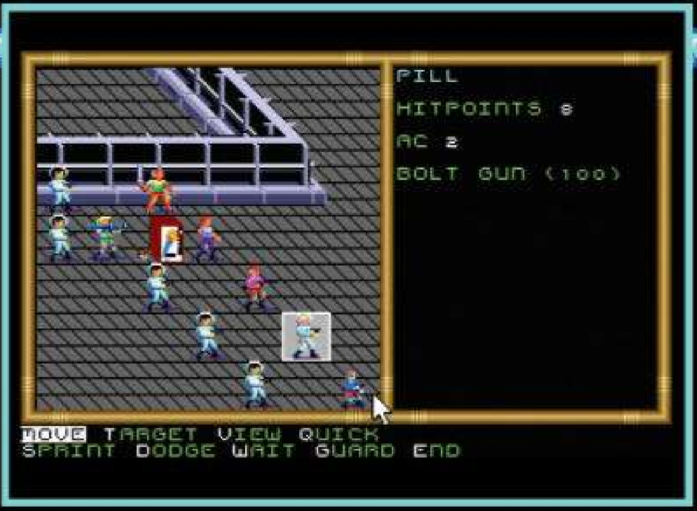
Another in SSI's fantastic Gold Box series, this Amiga version offers the sharpest and most colourful graphics, along with a wealth of weapons, skills and characters not present in the Mega Drive game. While the combat graphics left some unimpressed, the deep and evocative scenario was met with enthusiasm, and while it's never likely to convert action game fans, it's again one of the better RPGs for the system.



ME
HITPOINTS 11
AC 6
BOLT GUN (100)

PC

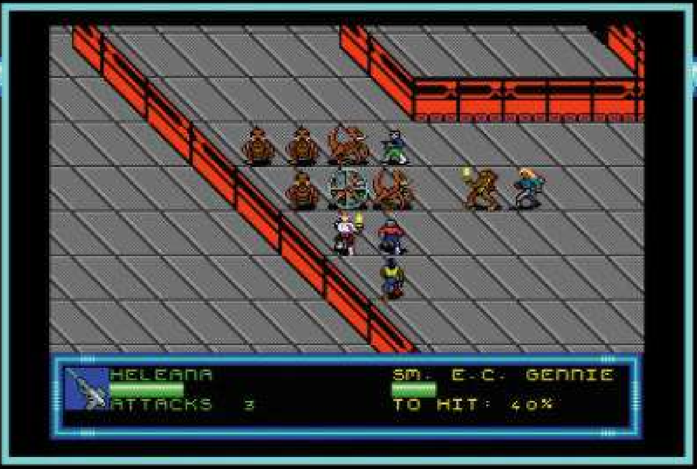
As the natural home for an in-depth sci-fi RPG based on D&D rules, *Doomsday* was met with a customer base well accustomed to the Gold Box engine used in games such as *Champions Of Krynn*. The sci-fi plot brought a fresh approach, however, and despite the relative lack of frills, the game was received favourably. Plot-wise it's similar to the Mega Drive game, with the additions common in the other two home computer versions.



PILL
HITPOINTS 8
AC 2
BOLT GUN (100)

MEGA DRIVE

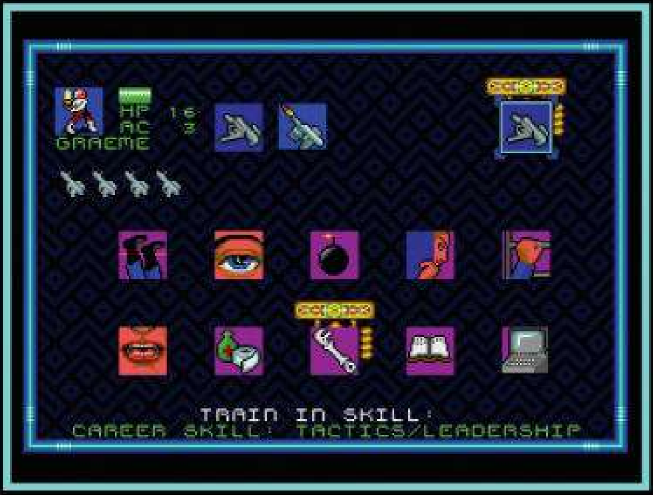
While scaled down in terms of character classes, skills and items, the Mega Drive adaptation stands out on Sega's system, perhaps due to the lack of similar games on the platform. Tight combat and limited explorative options help endear the game to its fanbase, as does the wonderful music by Jon Medek.



HELEANA
ATTACKS 3
SM. E-C. GENNIE
TO HIT: 40%

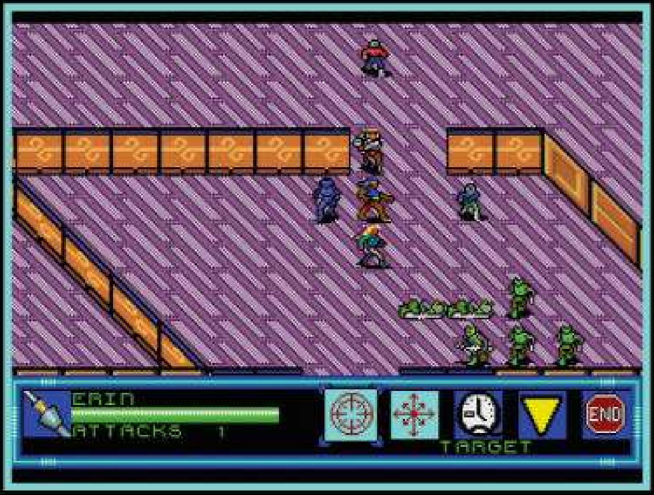
HOW TO AVOID DOOMSDAY

THE SOLAR SYSTEM IS A DANGEROUS PLACE. HERE ARE RETRO GAMER'S TIPS TO HELP YOU SURVIVE IN THE 25TH CENTURY



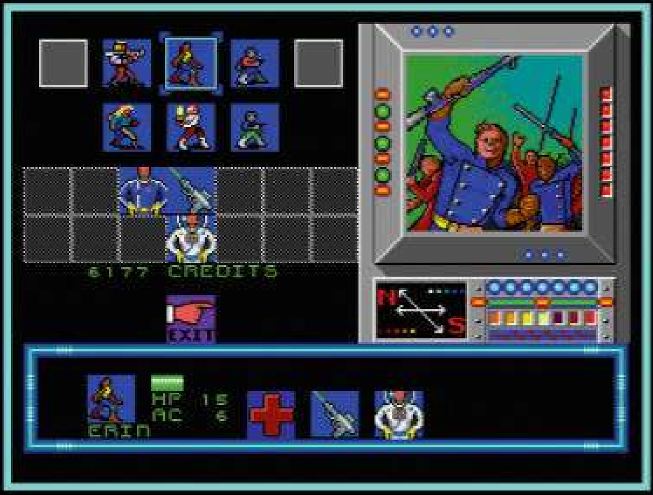
YOU NEED THE SKILLS

Zero-G helps characters move around in zero gravity situations, and given space encounters are common, loading this skill is super-useful. Leadership is another good skill early on, as it allows your warriors to command more NPCs and gives a better chance of winning the tactics roll at the start of every round. Treat wounds and first aid are understandably key, as is training your warriors in specific weapons.



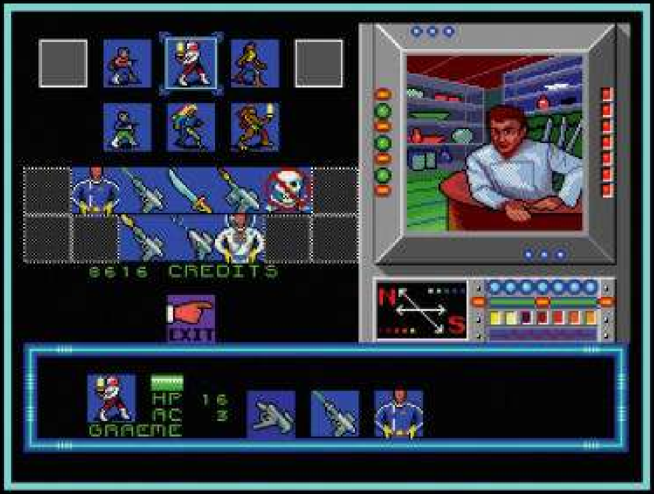
BOMB THE BASE

With medics, rogues and rocket jocks a necessity for every team, it's inevitable some characters won't be as good in combat as others. Offset this by arming them with grenade launchers early on – now they can chuck explosive, chaff and stun grenades. As you progress, arming them with rocket launchers and plasma throwers is the next step, and before long, these guys will be dealing just as much death as their warrior friends.



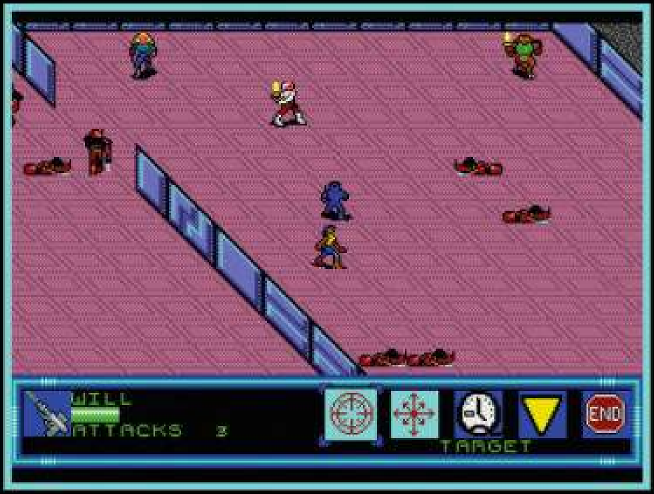
PROTECT YOURSELF

Armour is limited in *Buck Rogers*, yet the best suit is available practically at the start of the game. However, although the base on Aurora helpfully sells battle armour with fields, at 12,000 credits a pop, it'll be a while before all your party are sporting one of these suits. Elsewhere, make sure everyone has an ECM package to counter rocket pistols and goggles to protect against dazzle grenades. Blinded characters don't tend to shoot straight.



GUNS, GUNS, GUNS! AND SWORDS

Everyone has a preference, but generally the needle guns in *Buck Rogers* are the most dependable and all round effective weapon. Laser pistols come in second, but with RAM soldiers regularly dispensing mist grenades, their effectiveness is often neutered. For those who prefer to keep something handy for close encounters, we recommend the Lunarian Mono Sword, available for a mere 32,000 credits at the Tycho moon port.

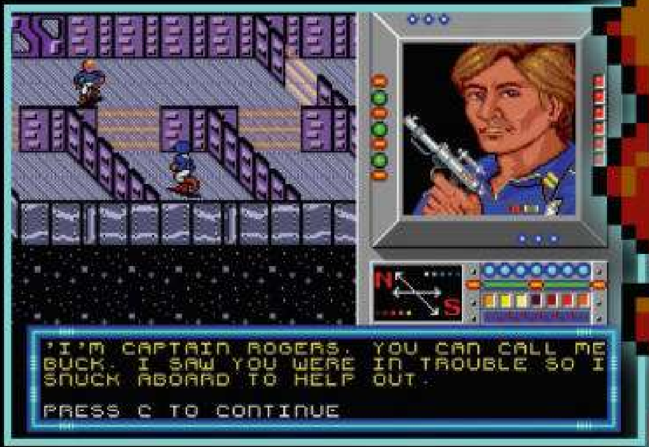


DISPERSE, FOCUS AND ELIMINATE

With many enemies in *Buck Rogers* sporting area effect weapons such as grenades and rocket launchers, spreading your team out as quickly as possible during combat is essential. Focus the warrior assault on any soldier or robot using these weapons in order to minimise the risk to the weaker characters in your party, and engage up-close with a powerful character if you can.

DRINK, TALK AND FIGHT

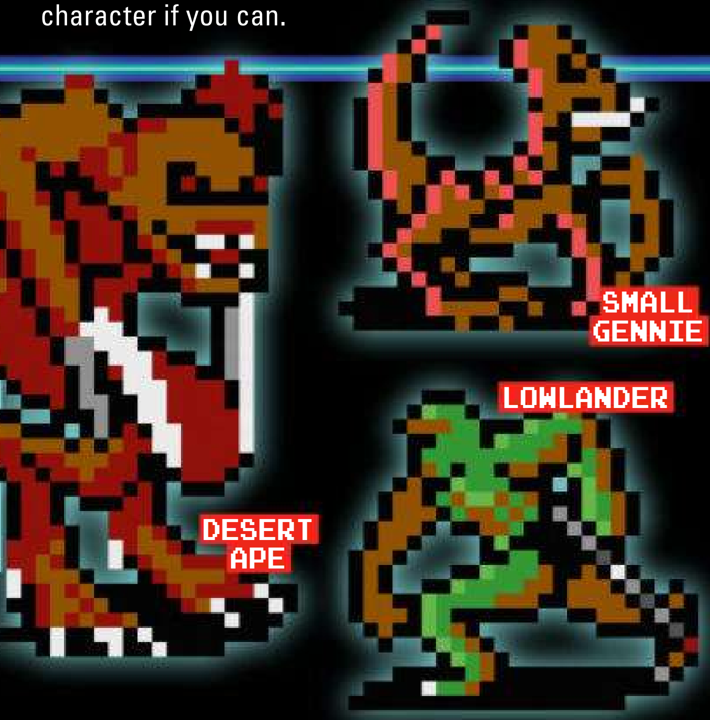
Each of the bases that you can visit has a bar where liquid refreshment can be bought. However, bar fights are frequent, and it won't be long before the zero-G boxing is forgotten and there are real fisticuffs going on as RAM troops crash the party. Take advantage by picking up all their gear once the dust has settled, before popping into the store right across the hallway and pocketing the credits.

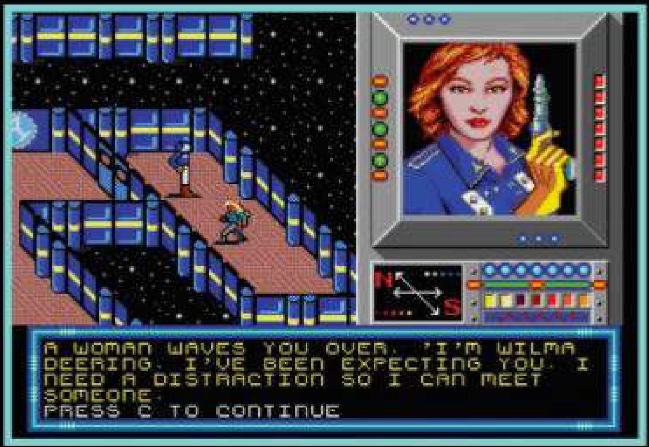


'I'M CAPTAIN ROGERS. YOU CAN CALL ME BUCK. I SAW YOU WERE IN TROUBLE SO I SNUCK ABOARD TO HELP OUT.'

PRESS C TO CONTINUE

» [Mega Drive] Buck himself is on hand to help out aboard the tricky pirate ship encounter.

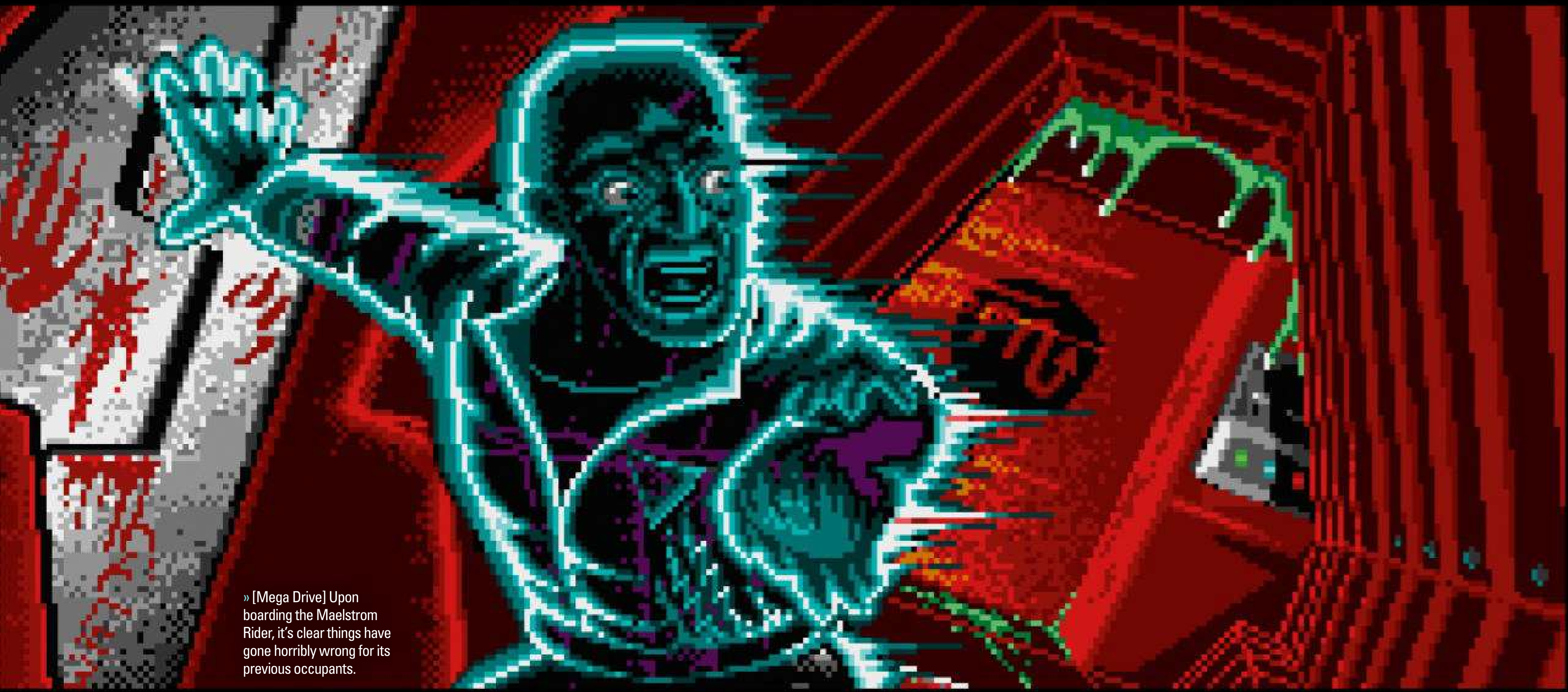




A WOMAN WAVES YOU OVER. 'I'M WILMA DEERING. I'VE BEEN EXPECTING YOU. I NEED A DISTRACTION SO I CAN MEET SOMEONE.'

PRESS C TO CONTINUE

» [Mega Drive] Late on in the game, NEO warrior Wilma Deering pops in to help the team.


» [Mega Drive] Upon boarding the Maelstrom Rider, it's clear things have gone horribly wrong for its previous occupants.

with some skills, such as zero-gravity manoeuvring and first aid, being useful for everybody. The character classes also have a specific skill that should be maximised as soon as possible. Warriors boast a leadership and tactics ability for commanding NPCs and battle strategies, while rocket jocks can fix their damaged rocket on the fly. Rogues are adept at bypassing security systems while medics are experts at healing the team post-battle.

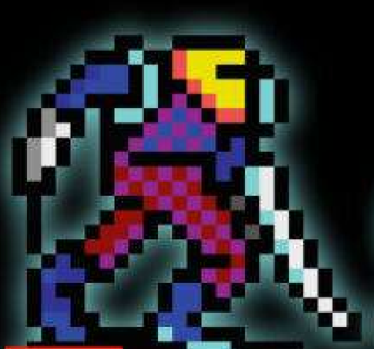
> " A LOT OF THE GAME HAD TO BE CUT TO FIT INTO THE CARTRIDGE "
> MICHAEL MCNALLY

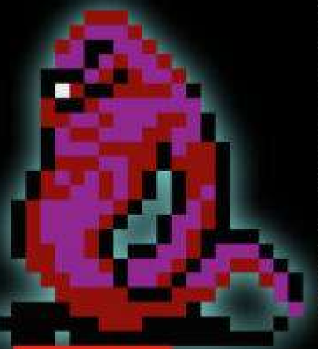
Once the team is ready, they must escape from a beleaguered Earth, defeating the local RAM forces before making their way to Salvation, the NEO base of operations on the Earth's moon. There, NEO leader, Carlton Turabian prepares the team for its first adventure, investigating a mysterious spaceship that has been located near the Earth. Once aboard, there's a hint of the Marie Celeste to this space craft. Ghostly figures drift past and slavering monsters soon attack the team. RAM is experimenting with genetically engineered creatures, only it's gone horribly wrong and the monsters have killed all of the soldiers and scientists.

Once these terrors are dispatched, the team hooks up with Scot.dos, a digital personality defecting from RAM to NEO, and takes command of this striking new spaceship, the Maelstrom Rider. Now the adventure begins in earnest as the solar system opens up to the player. Rotating around the sun are three more planets in addition to the Earth: Mars is the base for RAM operations while Venus is a neutral planet which contains gravitol, a vital mineral for space travel. Finally, there's Mercury, home of the corrupt mariposas, providers of precious energy for the entire system. Scattered in between these worlds are various asteroids and moons, all of which house commercial bases where the team can buy and sell items, train, relax or browse the library.

There are several different displays to *Buck Rogers*, led by two distinctive styles of combat. Close combat is handled in the same isometric perspective as navigation, with the player commanding all of their team in addition to any NPCs falling under their warriors' leadership skill. Each character has a certain number of moves (which can be greatly reduced in zero-gravity conditions) and a percentage figure to hit an enemy with their weapon. This is assigned with a variety of factors such as proficiency, environment and position in relation to the target. Weapons vary from conventional arms such as swords, grenades and rocket launchers to futuristic lasers and rocket pistols and the all-rounder of the game, the needle gun. Then, once the battle is concluded, the vanquished opponents can be plundered for spoils, which can either be equipped or sold for valuable credits.

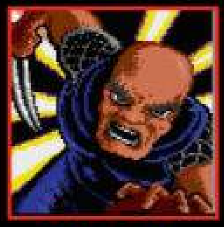
The second form of combat is aboard the player's spaceship, the Maelstrom Rider. While travelling throughout space, the team will regularly be intercepted by enemy craft. Engagement can be avoided with bluff or intimidation, but should these options fail, battle will commence. The

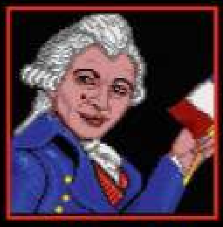

PIRATE

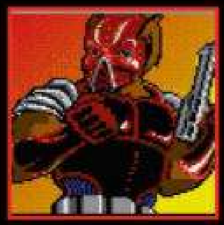

URSADDER

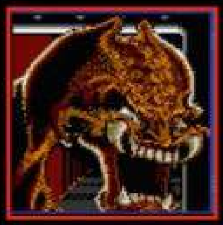
VILLAINS

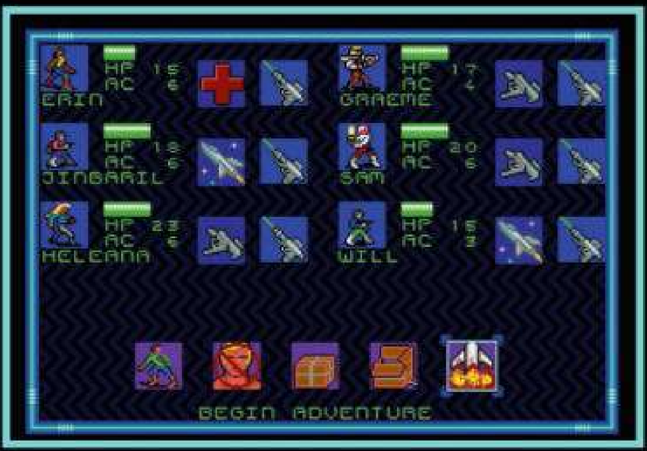
THE FOES YOU ARE UP AGAINST


TALON

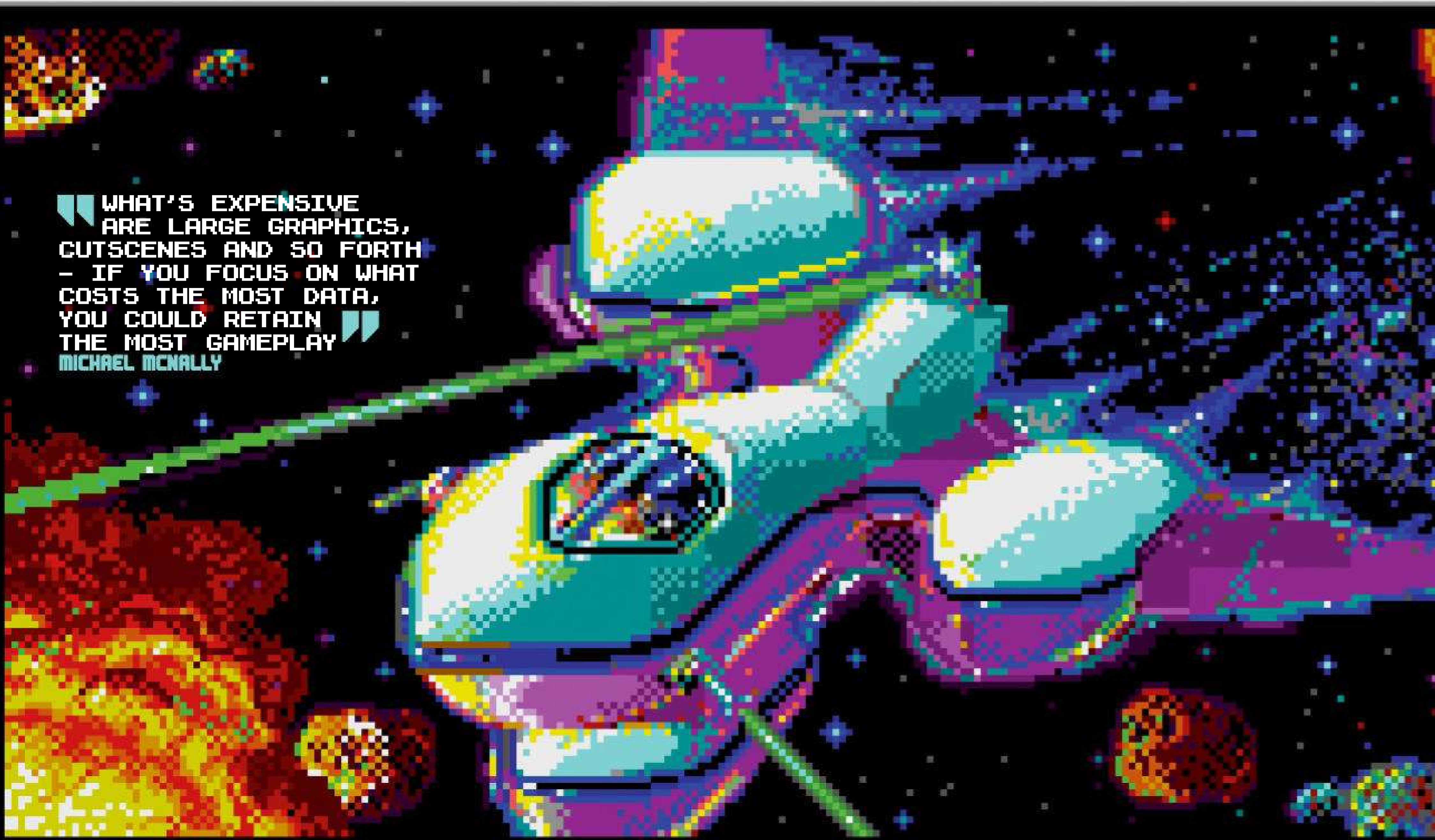

THE SUN KING


TERRINES


GENNIES



» [Mega Drive] All set? Time to save the world!

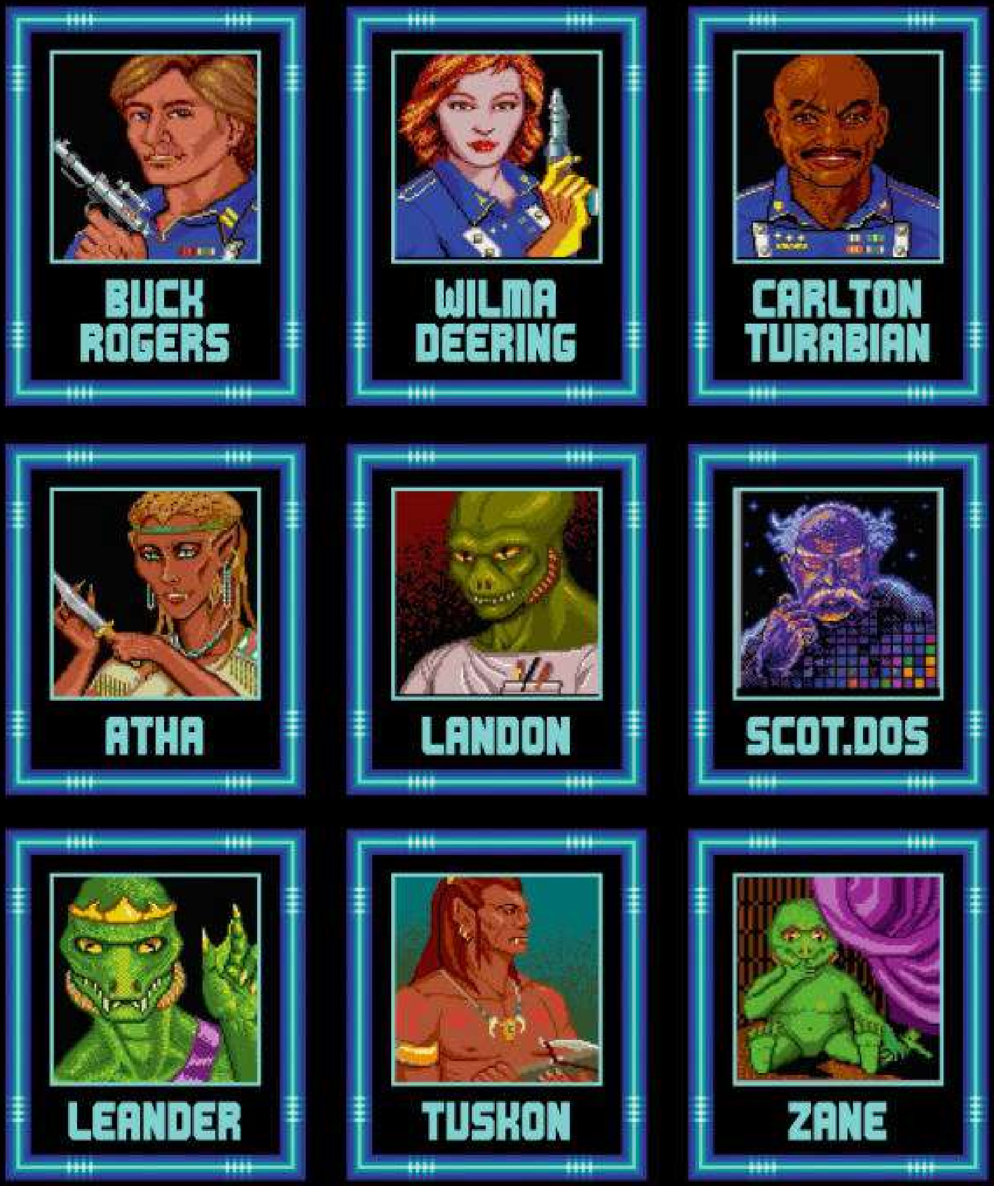


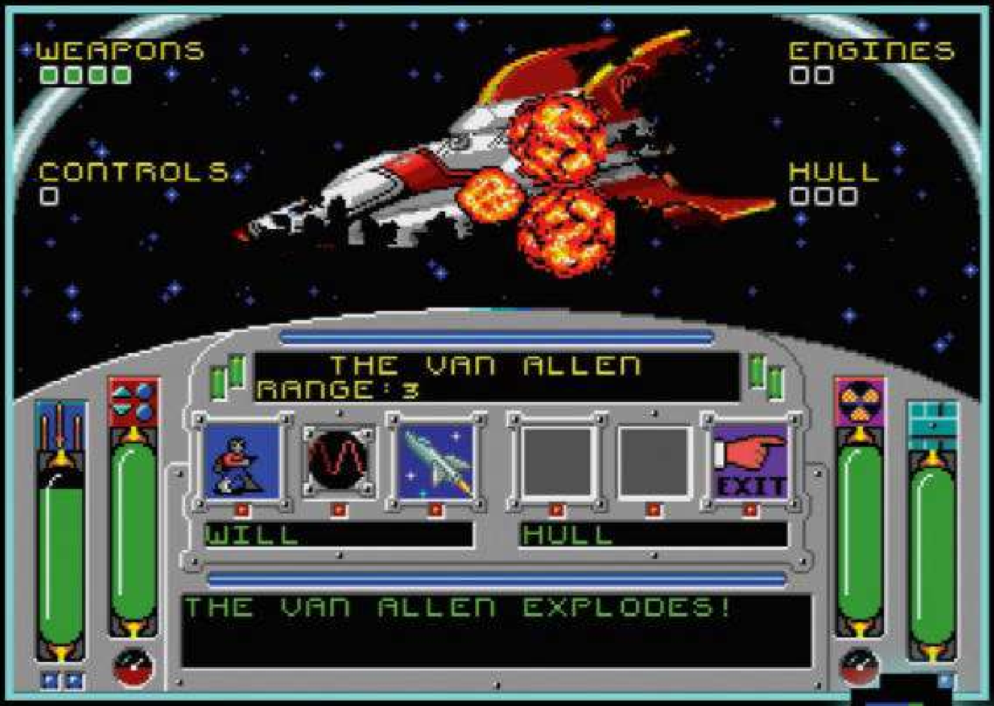
> WHAT'S EXPENSIVE ARE LARGE GRAPHICS, CUTSCENES AND SO FORTH – IF YOU FOCUS ON WHAT COSTS THE MOST DATA, YOU COULD RETAIN THE MOST GAMEPLAY
>
> **MICHAEL MCNALLY**

» [Mega Drive] RAM's pirate partner, Talon, attacks.

HEROES

WHO'S WHO IN THE COUNTDOWN TO DOOMSDAY

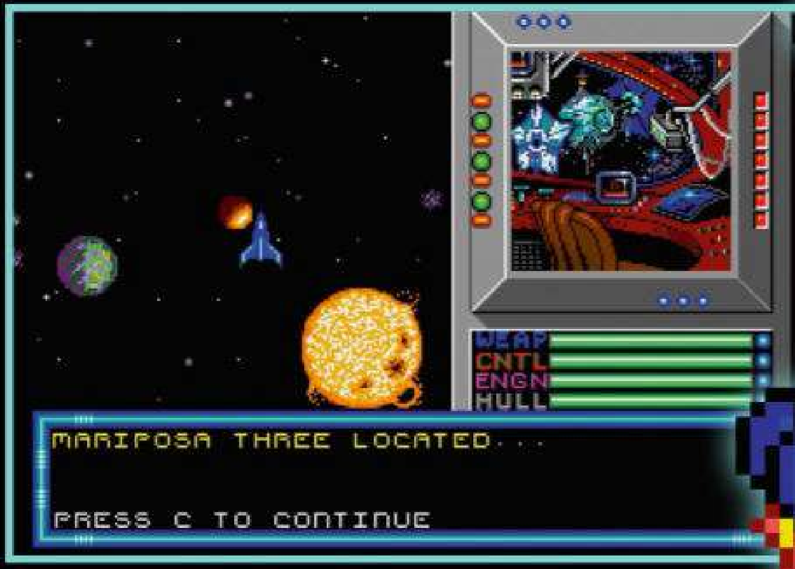

BUCK ROGERS
WILMA DEERING
CARLTON TURABIAN
ATHA
LANDON
SCOT.DOS
LEANDER
TUSKON
ZANE


WEAPONS
ENGINES
CONTROLS
HULL
WILL
HULL
EXIT

THE VAN ALLEN
RANGE: 3

THE VAN ALLEN EXPLODES!

» [Mega Drive] Space combat in the 25th century

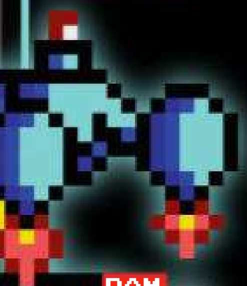

WEAP
CNTL
ENGN
HULL

MARIPOSA THREE LOCATED...

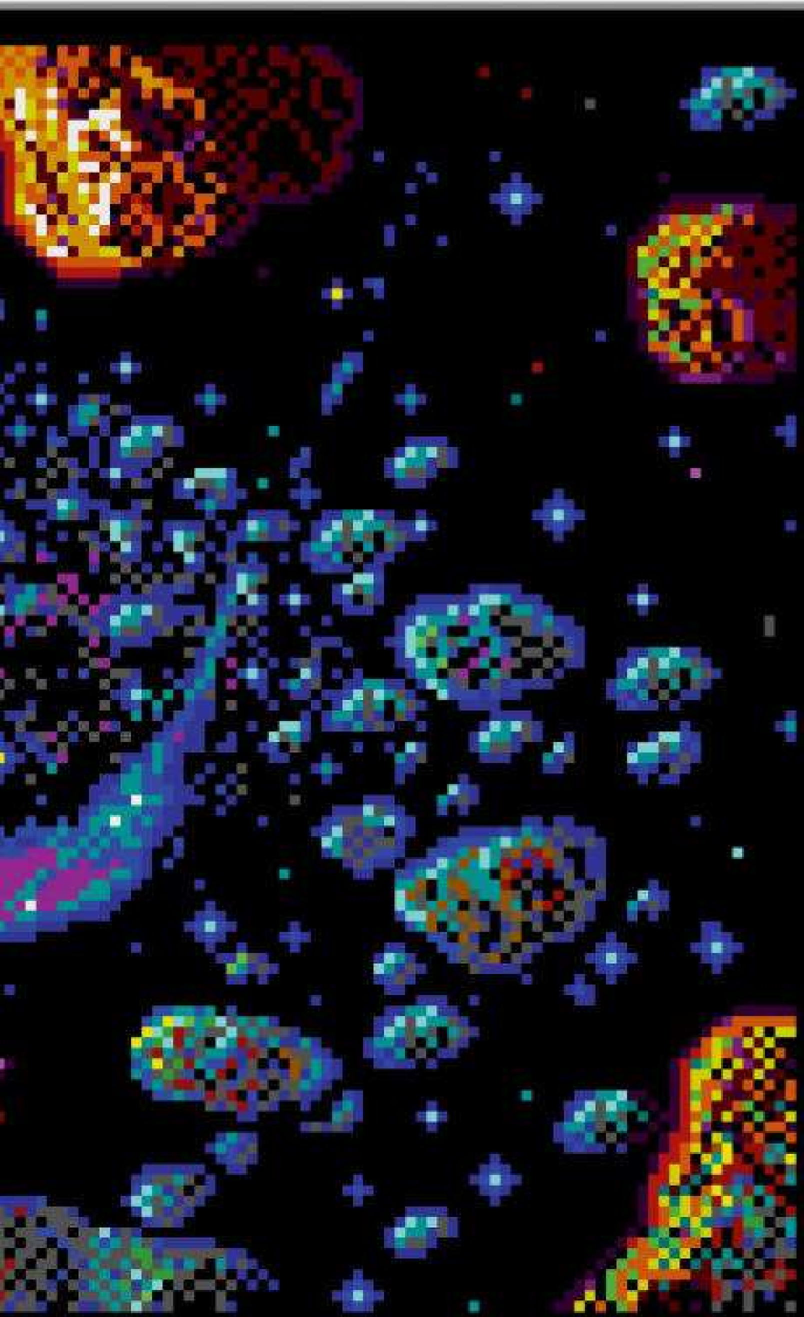
PRESS C TO CONTINUE

» [Mega Drive] Exploring the solar system aboard the Maelstrom Rider.

RAM ASSASSIN



RAM ROBOT



team then take turns in either attacking the other spaceship, repairing their own rocket (known as jury-rigging), reloading or healing injured characters. The essential person here is the rocket jock whose skill is up against the opposing pilot. By using their piloting nous, extra turns can be gained and should the battle become close enough, the player can decide to board or ram the enemy. During battle, different sections of the enemy spacecraft can be aimed at, with the percentage score to hit varying depending on the ease of the target and distance.

As you explore, bases and extra missions will be revealed. While *Countdown To Doomsday* is not overly encumbered with sidequests, there's always plenty to do and a singular focus to the game. Investigation into RAM's suspect experiments with genetic engineering take the team on a dangerous expedition across the solar system. First stop is the RAM base on Ceres where information on the Doomsday Laser should be available to a stealthy infiltration force. From here, the mission moves to the RAM stronghold of Mars, the lowlands of Venus and finally Mercury, home of the odd and gallic-obsessed mariposas. On Mars, a fragile co-existence between the desert runners and RAM can be exploited by NEO, and there's a similar situation on Venus as the green Lowlanders are ravaged by the evil corporation. Along the way, the team will make friends, enemies and encounter deadly situations with unavoidable regularity. And maybe, just maybe, you'll get to meet the legend and saviour of humanity, Buck Rogers himself. To the future! ✱

A CHAT WITH MICHAEL MCNALLY

DISCOVER HOW THE NEO FIGHT WAS TAKEN TO SEGA'S MEGA DRIVE

How did you find moving from PC to console development?
Buck Rogers was my first and only console development project and going from working on PC games to a console was a very constraining environment in that era. You had less memory and images had to have less bit depth or resolution.

How did you adapt the game to Sega's 16-bit console?
A lot of the game had to be cut to fit into the cartridge. From my standpoint, text, story and gameplay require relatively little data and shouldn't have been cut – I recall the decision to cut material was made by product management, independent of engineering. What's expensive are large graphics, cutscenes and so forth – if you focus on what costs the most data, you could retain the most gameplay.

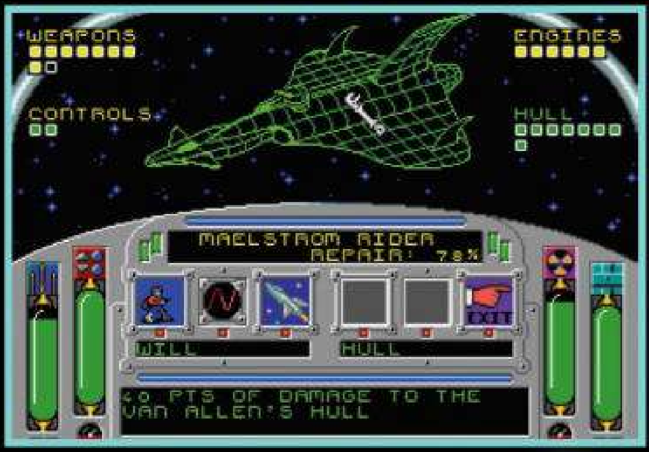
Sounds like it was bit of a slog.
Actually, I enjoyed developing for the console, rethinking how things had to be expressed in terms of tiles instead of the more arbitrary bitmaps was fun, as a kind of puzzle. The decisions to trim down for console seemed arbitrary and not data-driven by me.

Is there anything you felt could have been improved?
I felt the ship-to-ship combat was really weak and disappointing. But there was not [enough] time to make it better and nothing I could particularly do about it.

The biggest visual change was the navigation screen – how did that happen?
I added an isometric view – it surprised the product manager and was a total shock when I showed it to the unsuspecting team. I said 'Look guys, we can reuse the combat view for navigation…'. But they liked it, although it forced the artists to add a few more tile types for the wall joins.

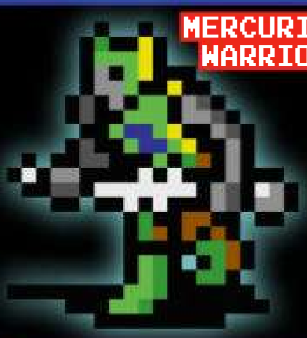
What else did you add?
I added some customisation to the UI and some semi-random patterned tiling behind the scenes to make them visually more appealing. I also had fun animating explosions with the area effect weapons, something the Genesis sprite system made easier to do than the desktop machines of the day.

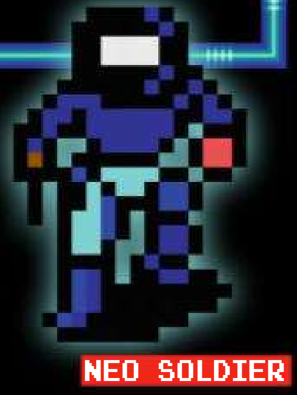
Looking back today, how do you think you did?
Overall, I'm satisfied that we had a fun and playable game, even if it was pretty different to the PC version and it had its lame moments. But you do what you can within a window of available time and ship it, even knowing it has got a bunch of imperfections.

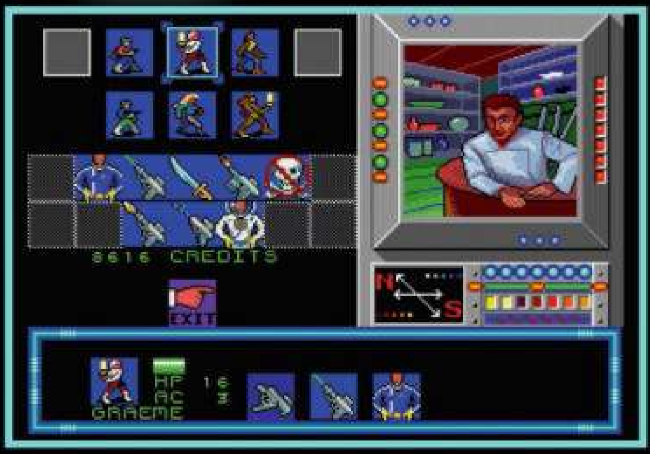


40 PTS OF DAMAGE TO THE VAN ALLEN'S HULL

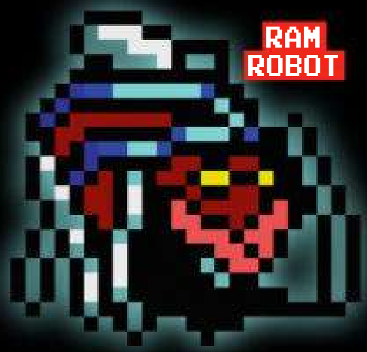
» [Mega Drive] During combat, the rocket jock can use their jury rig skill to repair damage to the Maelstrom Rider.

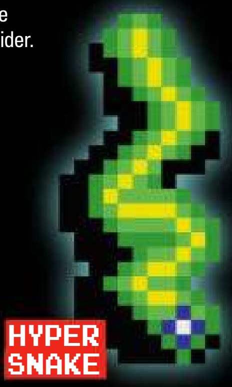

MERCURIAN WARRIOR


NEO SOLDIER



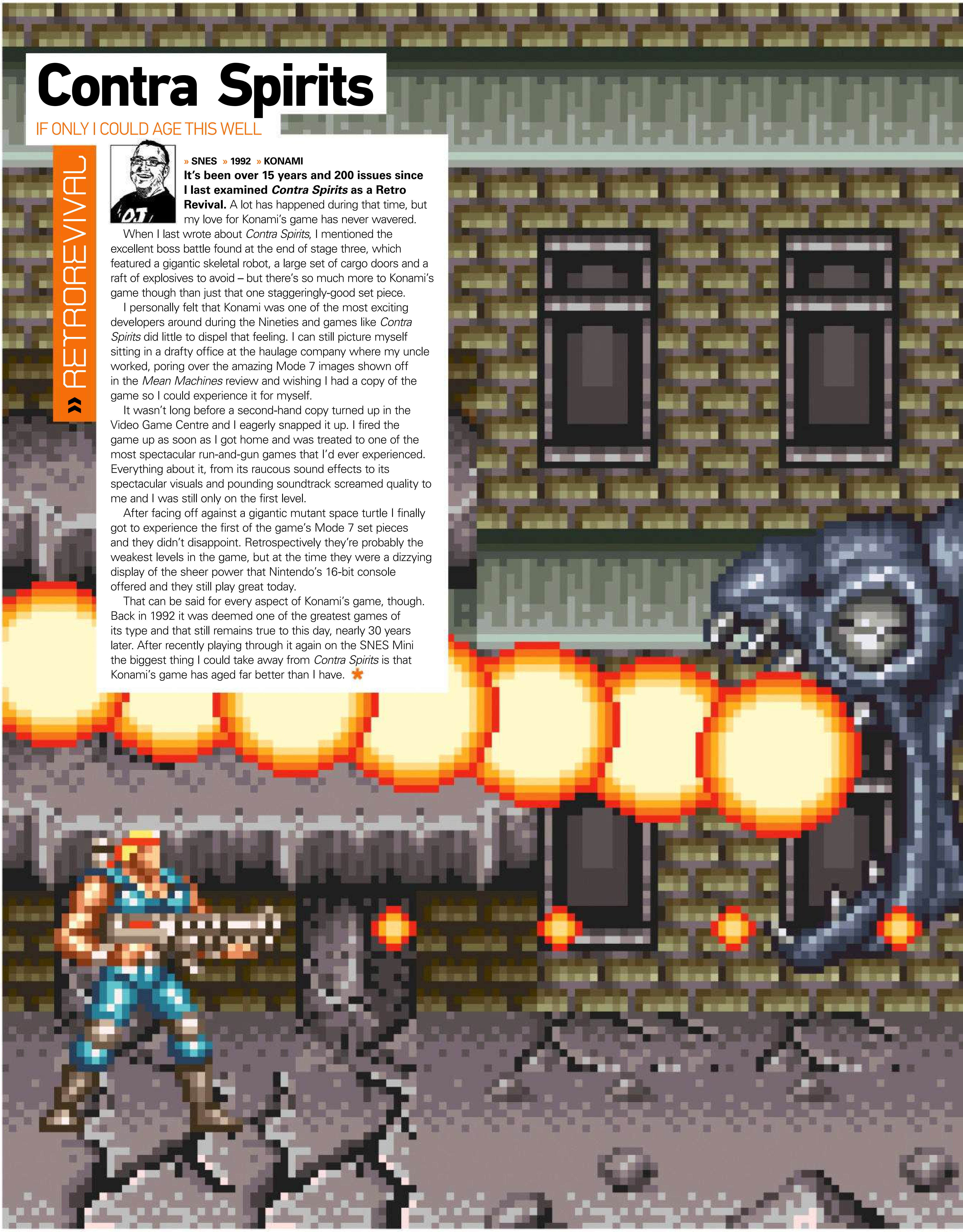
» [Mega Drive] Holding folding, intending spending.


RAM ROBOT


HYPER SNAKE

Contra Spirits

IF ONLY I COULD AGE THIS WELL



» SNES » 1992 » KONAMI

It's been over 15 years and 200 issues since I last examined *Contra Spirits* as a Retro Revival. A lot has happened during that time, but my love for Konami's game has never wavered.

When I last wrote about *Contra Spirits*, I mentioned the excellent boss battle found at the end of stage three, which featured a gigantic skeletal robot, a large set of cargo doors and a raft of explosives to avoid – but there's so much more to Konami's game though than just that one staggeringly-good set piece.

I personally felt that Konami was one of the most exciting developers around during the Nineties and games like *Contra Spirits* did little to dispel that feeling. I can still picture myself sitting in a drafty office at the haulage company where my uncle worked, poring over the amazing Mode 7 images shown off in the *Mean Machines* review and wishing I had a copy of the game so I could experience it for myself.

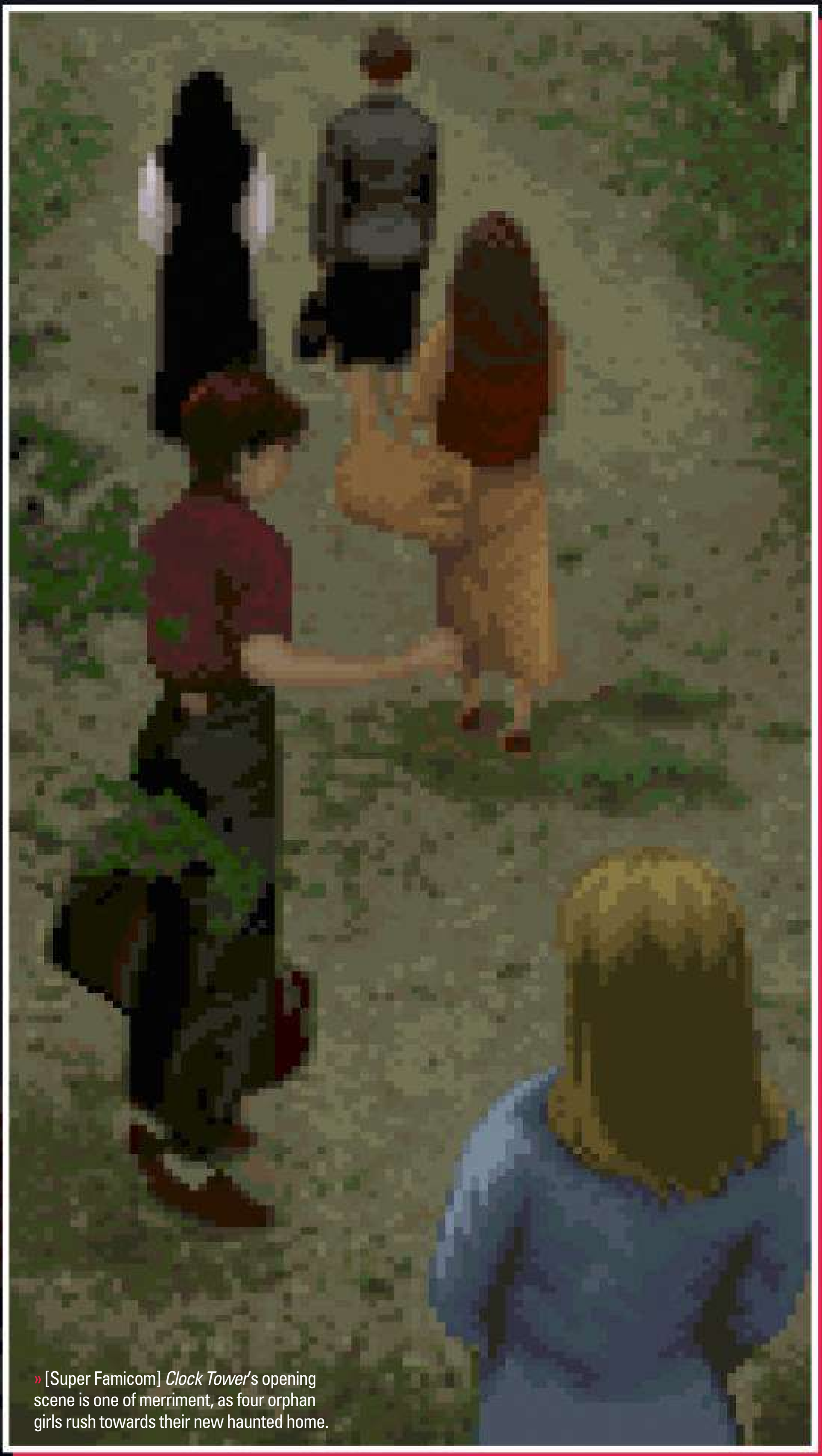
It wasn't long before a second-hand copy turned up in the Video Game Centre and I eagerly snapped it up. I fired the game up as soon as I got home and was treated to one of the most spectacular run-and-gun games that I'd ever experienced. Everything about it, from its raucous sound effects to its spectacular visuals and pounding soundtrack screamed quality to me and I was still only on the first level.

After facing off against a gigantic mutant space turtle I finally got to experience the first of the game's Mode 7 set pieces and they didn't disappoint. Retrospectively they're probably the weakest levels in the game, but at the time they were a dizzying display of the sheer power that Nintendo's 16-bit console offered and they still play great today.

That can be said for every aspect of Konami's game, though. Back in 1992 it was deemed one of the greatest games of its type and that still remains true to this day, nearly 30 years later. After recently playing through it again on the SNES Mini the biggest thing I could take away from *Contra Spirits* is that Konami's game has aged far better than I have.

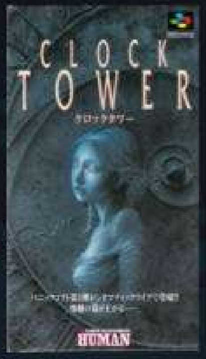
THE MAKING OF

CLOCK


» [Super Famicom] *Clock Tower*'s opening scene is one of merriment, as four orphan girls rush towards their new haunted home.

A JAPANESE CLASSIC STEEPED IN ALL THE EXCESS OF CULT ITALIAN HORROR, CLOCK TOWER HAS SPAWNED MULTIPLE SEQUELS, SUCCESSORS AND AN EERIE SURVIVAL HORROR LEGACY. CREATOR HIFUMI KONO TALKS US THROUGH ITS DEVELOPMENT AND THE CRAFTING OF ITS UNFORGETTABLE TERRORS

WORDS BY SARA ELSAM



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** HUMAN ENTERTAINMENT, INC

» **DEVELOPER:** HUMAN ENTERTAINMENT, INC

» **RELEASED:** 1995

» **PLATFORM:** SNES

» **GENRE:** SURVIVAL HORROR

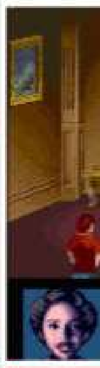
Survival horror has been a mainstay of gaming for decades now; horror and hiding in cupboards go hand-in-hand it seems. However, some of the first seeds of the genre lay in the widely revered and hugely unsettling Japanese point-and-click adventure game, *Clock Tower*.

First released on the SNES in 1995, it sees you playing a 14-year-old orphan girl trapped in a mansion of unknowable terrors, as you desperately try to outpace an unrelenting golden-haired child wielding a gigantic pair of scissors. He can turn up anytime, and does so with reckless glee.

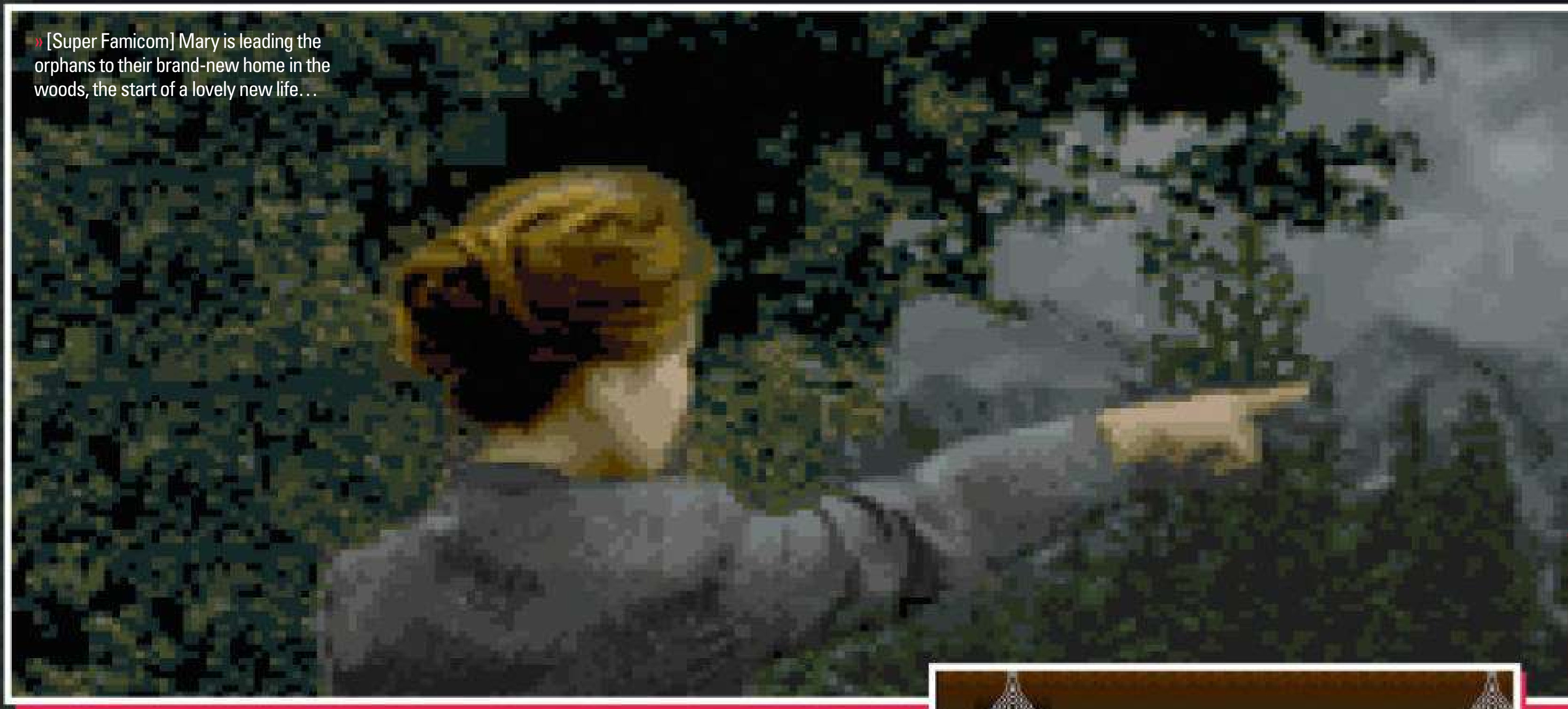
Lacking the fiery arsenal of weapons seen in the likes of *Resident Evil*, you have to escape using a mix of wits and point-and-click puzzle action (the sort where a slice of ham can mean life or death), plus, plenty of hiding until the horrors pass. While the dexterous mashing of buttons may grant short-lived escape, you'll also find yourself panicked – meaning you're likely to trip up as you run from your tiny, pointy pursuer.

Grim, tense and somewhat surreal, *Clock Tower* introduced a new type of horror to a generation of gamers, and was wildly popular on release. Since then, it has left its bloody, yet restrained, legacy on videogames – forming much of the blueprint of survival horror titles.

Whether through the myriad of *Clock Tower* sequels, or the modern games that cite its simmering tension as an inspiration, such as *Alien: Isolation*, where you creep around long corridors avoiding the alien, or *Amnesia: Dark Descent*, in which you are helpless and reduced to hiding in cupboards until the unknowable



TOWER

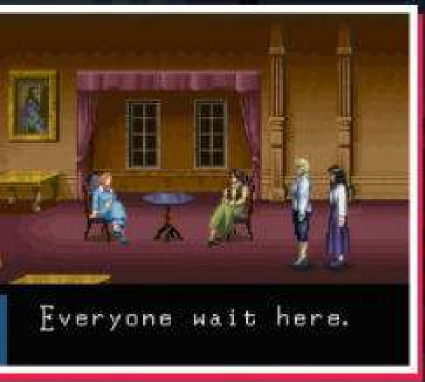


» [Super Famicom] Mary is leading the orphans to their brand-new home in the woods, the start of a lovely new life…

> “Originally, when I would come up with an idea for a project, I would often break down the structure of a film, anime, or novel that I liked”
> HIFUMI KONO

nasty passes, its impact on modern gaming is undeniable.

Plus, with its nine different endings and varied grisly deaths based solely on your choices, it’s fair to say *Clock Tower* has slasher-style DNA, seen in future games like *Until Dawn*. Coming in at under two hours to play, its choices and randomly generated rooms also provided potential for replays – its endings, as you’d expect, mostly result in death, although some promised the unravelling of dark secrets.

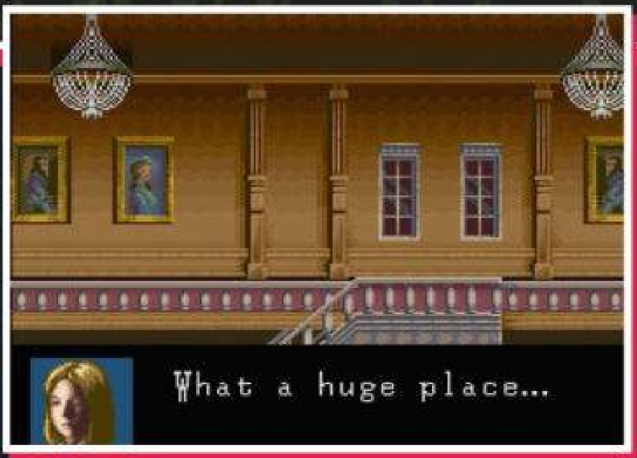


Everyone wait here.

» [Super Famicom] As soon as you arrive at your new, definitely haunted home with orphan friends in tow, your guardian Mary mysteriously disappears…

We spoke to *Clock Tower* director and creator Hifumi Kono, discussing the making of a horror classic and its origins within the blood-soaked screamscapes of horror movies like cult-classic *Suspiria*.

At school, Kono was an avid player of simulation games, although PC games weren’t his favoured choice, he instead preferred tactical and strategic board games released by The Avalon Hill Game Company. His first foray into designing came with a card game he created at university, which used rivalries between the yakuza as a motif. “That was when I realised the joy of having so many people play something that I had created,” comments Kono. “I believe this experience was the catalyst for me to dive into the world of videogames.”



What a huge place...

» [Super Famicom] The orphans are in awe of the opulent mansion, complete with a myriad of gothic-style fittings.

This however, did not form the horrors seen at the heart of *Clock Tower*. Kono’s love of terror was gleaned instead from watching horror movies such as *The Exorcist*, *The Omen* and *Suspiria* in his university dorm room.

“Originally, when I would come up with an idea for a project, I would often break down ▶

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DANCE AEROBICS
SYSTEM: NES
YEAR: 1987

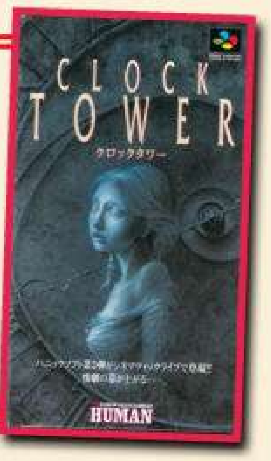
FIRE PRO WRESTLING
SYSTEM: SNES, PC
YEAR: 1989

TWILIGHT SYNDROME (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION, NINTENDO DS
YEAR: 1996

» Hifumi Kono, the games industry veteran behind company Nude Maker, created *Clock Tower* back in 1995.

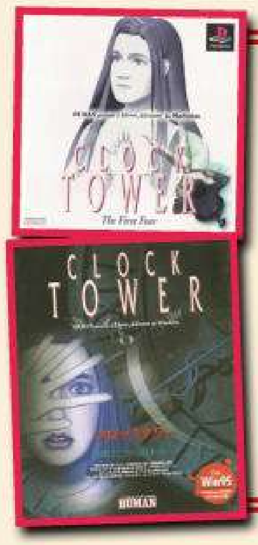
TOWERING VERSIONS

THE MANY FACES OF HIFUMI KONO'S CLASSIC



CLOCK TOWER

■ The initial release of *Clock Tower* in 1995 was an exclusive on the Super Famicom, known in the West as the SNES. Despite selling well, it was never released out of Japan in its original form – although legions of fans have made English translations over the years.



CLOCK TOWER: THE FIRST FEAR

■ In 1997, *Clock Tower* was re-released in an enhanced port as *Clock Tower: The First Fear* on PlayStation and Windows PC. This PlayStation version had new sounds and sights, plus additional full-motion video scenes. It was not released outside of Japan, although a plethora of fan translations exist.

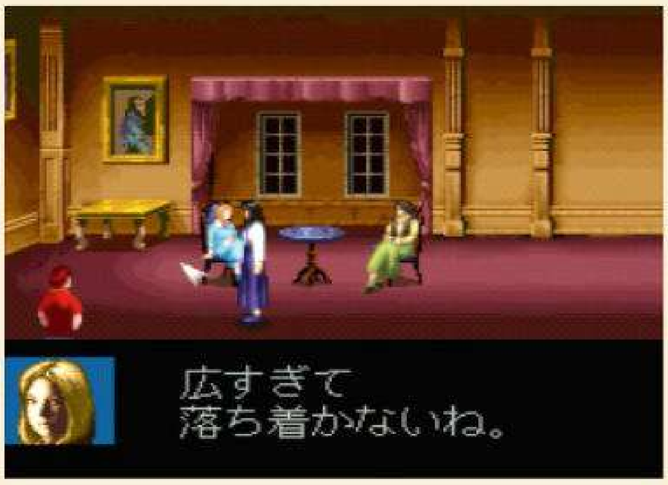
WonderSwan
CLOCK TOWER
for WonderSwan
naxat
ヘッドホン視覚ソフト

CLOCK TOWER

■ A monochromatic version of *Clock Tower* was released on the handheld console WonderSwan in 1999, ported from the PlayStation build. The vivid look of *Clock Tower* did not take well to black and white, with various parts of the game's UI being haphazardly adapted to the format. Most punishing of all, this version of the game could not be paused.

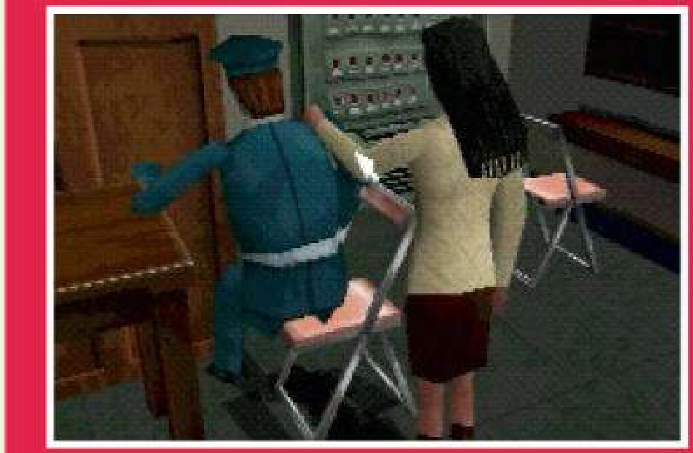
CLOCK TOWER (THE DIGITAL RE-RELEASES)

■ In 2010, *Clock Tower* was digitally re-released on the Wii, and in 2011, it came to the PlayStation 3 store. As per usual, they remained Japanese exclusives. Western audiences are still waiting for their own official *Clock Tower* re-release.



広すぎて
落ち着かないね。

A LOOMING LEGACY

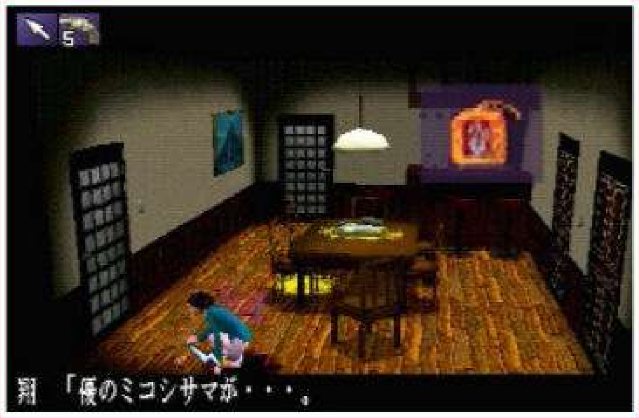


CLOCK TOWER 2

■ The first sequel, released in 1996 and which unlike its predecessor, got a Western release – it was after all, operating in a post *Resident Evil* world. One of the first games among the Human Entertainment cadre to use a 3D graphics engine, it went on to sell nearly half a million copies and gained critical acclaim. Confusingly, it's also named *Clock Tower* in some regions. After this, Kono would not work officially on the series ever again.

CLOCK TOWER 2: THE STRUGGLE WITHIN

■ A PlayStation sequel not directed by Hifumi Kono that was released in 1998 for PlayStation across Japan and the US, it shifted away from *Clock Tower* lore into an entirely new direction that lacked series antagonist Scissorman and an actual clock tower. This game was badly received by critics and is generally regarded as the worst game of the series.



翔 「優のミコシサマが・・・。

▶ the structure of a film, anime, or novel that I liked. I would then extract what it was that I found interesting and why, and then structure it out," says Kono.

"So when I created *Clock Tower*, I drew from what fascinated me about horror films like *Phenomena* and *Suspiria*. The suspense of being chased and the thrill of hiding from a killer while holding your breath – neither of these aspects existed in videogames at the time. That's why I felt it was worth depicting them."

Phenomena, undeniably, shaped *Clock Tower*. The weird and very gory Dario Argento (of *Suspiria* fame) film features a young girl who can communicate telepathically with bugs and a stranger wielding a large pair of silver scissors. These lurid, strange images laid down the foundation for what was to become *Clock Tower*.

Kono then went on to work at Japanese company Human Entertainment, which, while not well-known in the West, went on to develop over 80 games. However, getting *Clock Tower* developed at the company was not as straightforward as it might appear.

"Back then, Human Entertainment basically had a policy of not developing titles other than sports games. This was understandable as a management policy because it was stable and guaranteed sales, but as a developer, I was starved for an outlet to demonstrate my creativity," Kono elaborates.

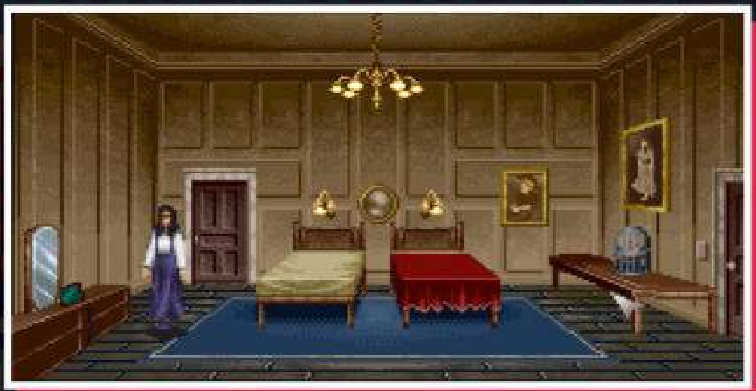
As well as originating the popular *Fire Pro Wrestling* series, Human Entertainment was well-known for developing the first ever music rhythm videogame, *Dance Aerobics* – nearly a decade before the likes of *Dance Dance Revolution*.

"So, the members of the planning division negotiated with upper management to let us try our hand at an original game. As a result, all the employees decided to hold a competition where anyone could participate freely. It was open to anyone with the condition that the winner would go into full production."

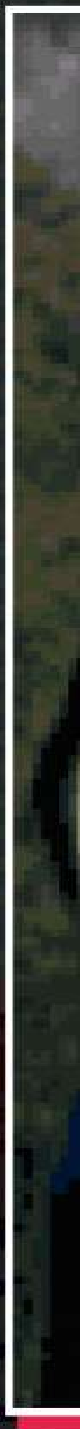
Kono decided to design something similar to the 'cinematic live games' made by Human Entertainment at the time, which included *SOS*, in which you escaped a sinking ship, and its spiritual successor, *The Firemen*, where you're tasked with saving civilians from a monstrous blaze that erupts at a Christmas party.

"With the exception of *Sweet Home*, the only horror games that existed at that time were action games with a horror flavour, like *Splatterhouse*, and that was not my ideal version of horror," he continues. Although *Splatterhouse* was steeped in horror influences including HP Lovecraft and American slasher movies, it was also a side-scrolling beat-'em-up.

Not that *Clock Tower* does not rely all that much on gore, it leans more towards atmosphere. That said, the mansion itself is rife with all manner



» [Super Famicom] Some rooms have deadly accessories, such as the malicious parrot and cursed mirror visage seen in the bedroom, which can cause instant death.



A HOST OF SEQUELS AND SUCCESSORS – FOR BETTER OR WORSE

CLOCK TOWER 3

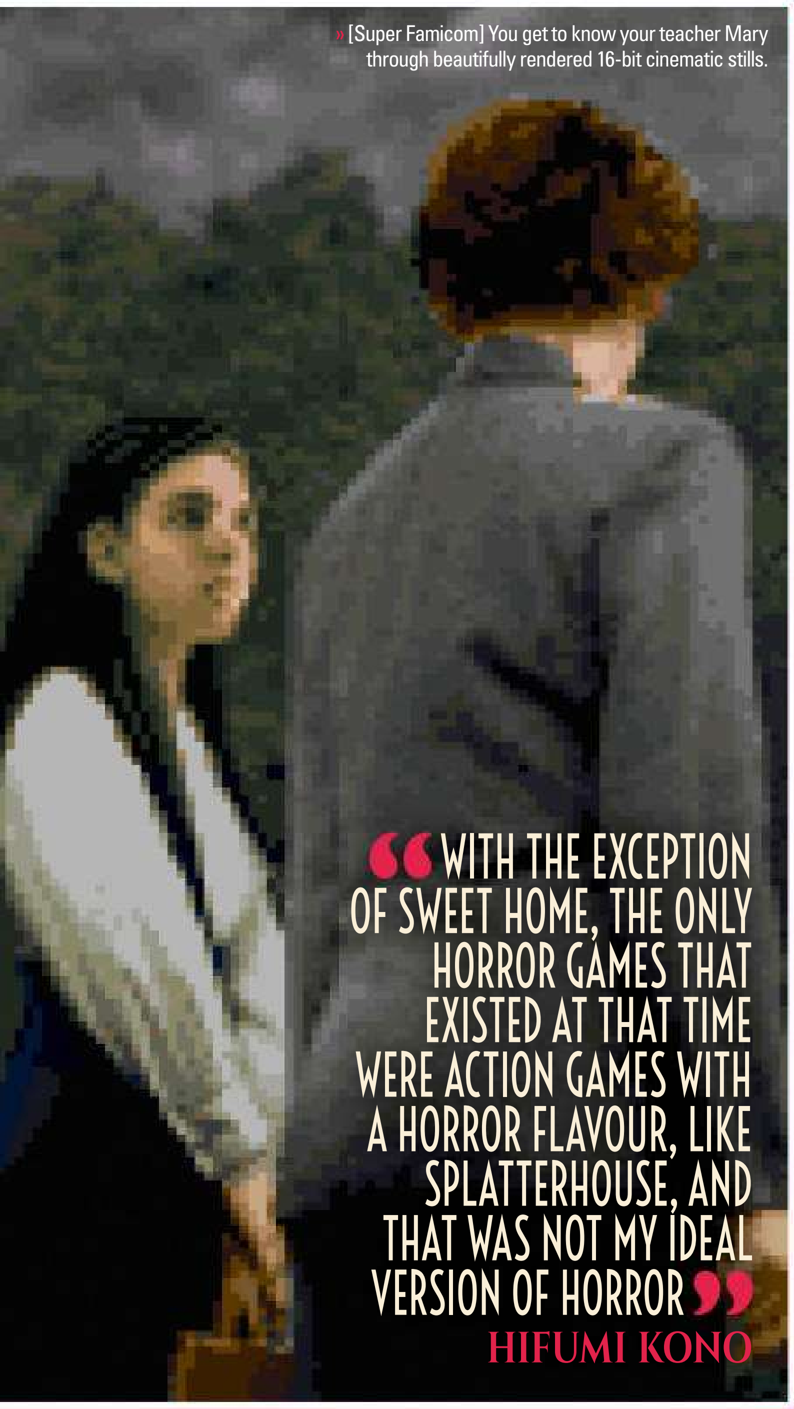
■ Released for the PlayStation 2 as a joint venture between Sunsoft – who became the sole owner of the *Clock Tower* IP following the disintegration of Human Entertainment in 2000 – and Capcom in the year 2002, this instalment moved from the series' point-and-click route and instead went for a third-person action setup. It was directed by veteran film director Kinji Fukasaku, well-known for ultra-violent satire film *Battle Royale*. Despite its movie-level prestige, it got mixed reviews and did not meet its sales projections.

HAUNTING GROUND

■ Released by Capcom in 2005 across Japan, US and Europe, *Haunting Ground* is not officially tied to *Clock Tower 3*, but serves as more of a spiritual successor – as it features multiple people who worked on it. *Haunting Ground* follows a teenage girl and her trusty dog companion trapped in a horrible castle. It went on to receive mixed reviews.

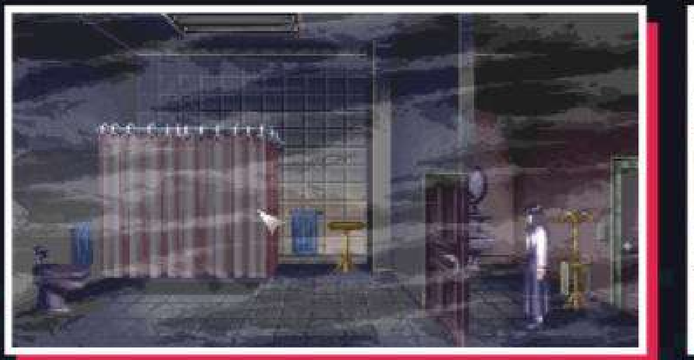
NIGHTCRY

■ Directed by *Clock Tower* series creator Hifumi Kono along with *The Grudge* director Takashi Shimizu, *NightCry* was released in 2016 via Kickstarter on *Clock Tower: The First Fear*'s 20th anniversary for PC and PlayStation Vita. Set on a cruise that inevitably gets murderous, *NightCry* went on to get mixed reviews.

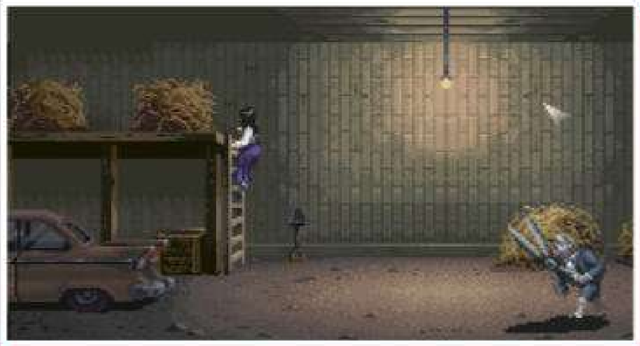


» [Super Famicom] You get to know your teacher Mary through beautifully rendered 16-bit cinematic stills.

> "WITH THE EXCEPTION OF SWEET HOME, THE ONLY HORROR GAMES THAT EXISTED AT THAT TIME WERE ACTION GAMES WITH A HORROR FLAVOUR, LIKE SPLATTERHOUSE, AND THAT WAS NOT MY IDEAL VERSION OF HORROR"
>
> **HIFUMI KONO**



» [Super Famicom] Soon enough, Jennifer will come across the terrifying Scissorman at a grisly scene.



» [Super Famicom] When Scissorman comes, you'll need to find places hidden or out of reach to survive.

of horrible, gothic nasties: dead animal heads, buzzing insects resting on meat and eerie mannequins, to name a few things rendered beautifully in all the glory of 16-bit.

With all that considered, Kono drew up designs embodying his idea of horror, and then went on to win the competition. Following its conception, the next step for *Clock Tower* was actually developing it.

"All of my game designs are based on a series of logical steps, so my process is pretty much solidified at the proposal stage," Kono explains. "So once development started, I only had to focus on things like the flow of the story, creating the map, and event production. However, there was only one problem. Outside of the text adventure genre, the idea of not being able to attack or defeat your enemies was a very foreign concept for games back then." As a result, Kono's ideas received a lot of pushback from the team.

Successful titles during the era included the aforementioned *Sweet Home*, a Capcom survival horror based on the Japanese horror film of the same name. It sees you exploring a cursed, horrible mansion as five film makers. *Sweet Home* eventually went on to be the inspiration for the hugely successful *Resident Evil* series – which was originally pitched as a 3D remake of *Sweet Home*.

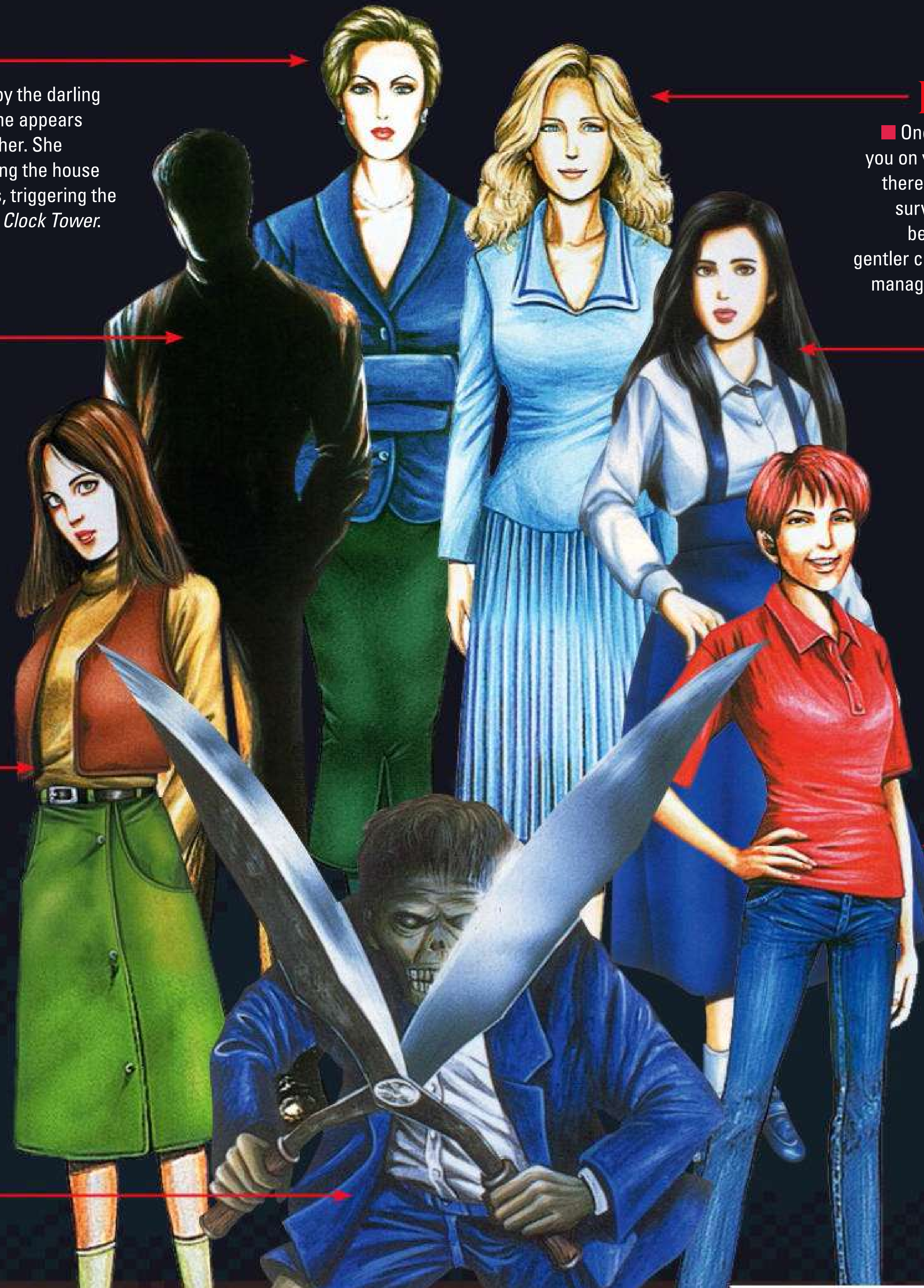
Haunted house adventure *Alone In The Dark*, which Kono has previously cited as an inspiration for *Clock Tower*, was also well received around this time. However, unlike *Clock Tower*, both titles included combat as a part of the mechanics. In the context of the time, it's understandable how a non-fighting orientated videogame might seem like quite an unrealistic punt.

Clock Tower's player character, Jennifer, is just a regular teenage girl. She moves at a pace that is punishingly slow, she gets freaked out and it takes her an age to climb to safety. This also turned out to be one of the aspects of the game that is most frightening. It leaves running away as your only option, and obstacles that could be jumped over or shot down in other games, present life-ending threats as you stagger haplessly away from your stalker.

"Additionally, the leadership system with directors and team members wasn't clearly established at Human Entertainment back then, making it unclear who had the right to make the final call on game decisions," Konno further explains. "I had only been with the

THE CLOCK TOWER CAST

MEET THE CURSED INHABITANTS OF THE CLOCK TOWER MANSION



MARY

Referred to as 'Miss Mary' by the darling girls trapped in the mansion, she appears as an innocent and loving teacher. She disappears shortly after entering the house to fetch its owner, Mr Barrows, triggering the tragic events that culminate in *Clock Tower*.

SIMON BARROWS

The mysterious benefactor who has adopted the orphans and is owner of the Barrows Mansion, aka Clock Tower – due to its most prominent feature. Simon is missing at the start and is unable to greet his new adopted daughters on arrival, although signs point to him being somewhere in the mansion.

ANNE

One of Jessica's orphan friends and the oldest of the group. While she can be saved, poor Anne is most infamous for flailing haplessly in the mansion's pool, moments before the brutal Scissorman erupts out of the water. Another of Anne's potential deaths is likely inspired by the artfully arranged 'ceiling' murder scene from the film *Phenomena*.

BOBBY

Stalker and slasher villain extraordinaire, Bobby, also known throughout the series as Scissorman, is your main tormentor. A small boy sporting an undead pallor and a vast set of scissors, he turns up randomly throughout to torment the girls. Sadistic and very murderous, his weird origins come to light as you progress through the mansion.

LAURA HARRINGTON

One of your companions, Laura joins you on your doomed mansion trek. While there is an alternate ending where she survives, she is most likely to end up being horribly murdered. One of the gentler characters of the series, she didn't manage to make it to any of the sequels.

JENNIFER SIMPSON

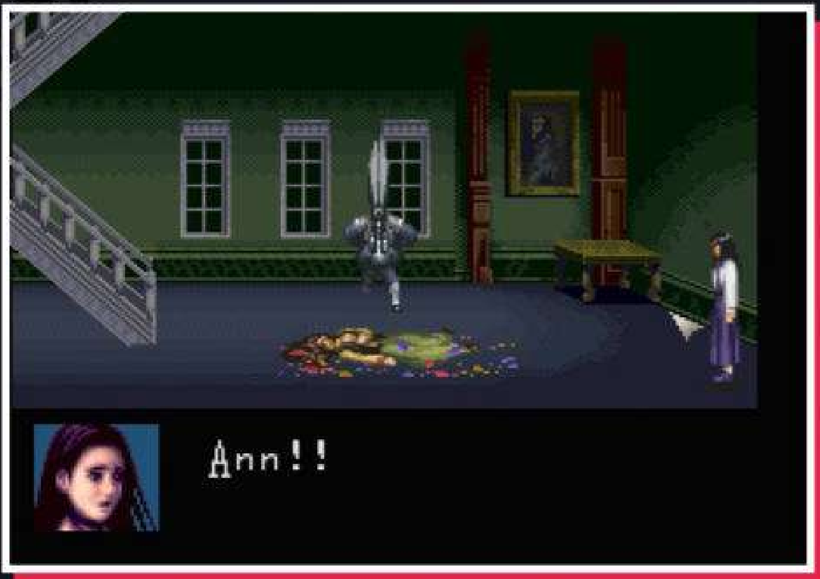
Player character, orphan Jennifer, is adopted by a wealthy recluse and escorted to his creepy Norweigan mansion, along with her friends and teacher. Shy and somewhat quiet, she leaves to find her teacher, and then is left alone while her friends are plucked off one-by-one. Notably, the character looks exactly like the tormented heroine of the Dario Argento film, *Phenomena*, played by actress Jennifer Connelly.

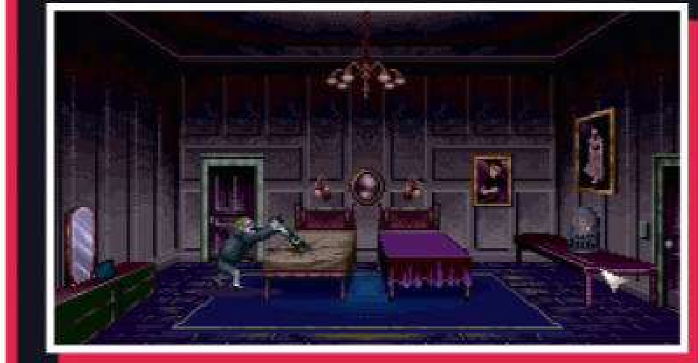
LOTTE

Jessica's closest friend from the Graine Orphanage, Lotte is shy, strong-willed and very uneasy about the mansion. There is no way to save her from the mansion, and Lotte dies whatever choices the player makes – though some ways more grisly than others. Like many horror characters, Lotte has a particularly ill-fated shower scene.

> "DO NOT RELY ON THE FEAR OF YOUR MONSTER'S DESIGN"
> HIFUMI KONO

» [Super Famicom] It's a race to survive in *Clock Tower*, running through rooms haphazardly trying to find somewhere to hide.




» [Super Famicom] Not all hiding places work when fending off Scissorman, as evidenced by him stabbing the mattress Jennifer is hiding in.

company for two years by then, so everyone on my team either had the same seniority as me or more. This made things more difficult." As a result, Kono felt he only had a few people in his corner.

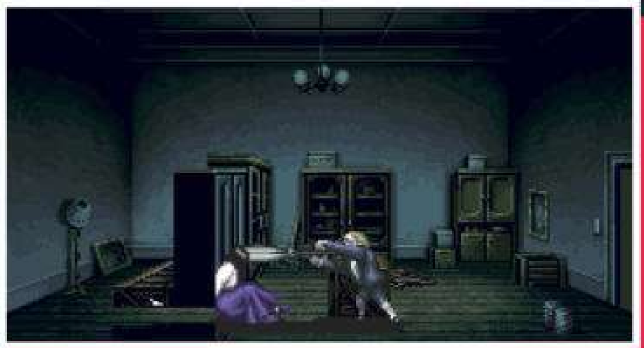
"So, I had to ask some people nicely if they could help, and tell others assertively to do as I say. That's how we completed *Clock Tower*. There was one member of the development team who was particularly defiant. They would openly say 'This game is boring'.

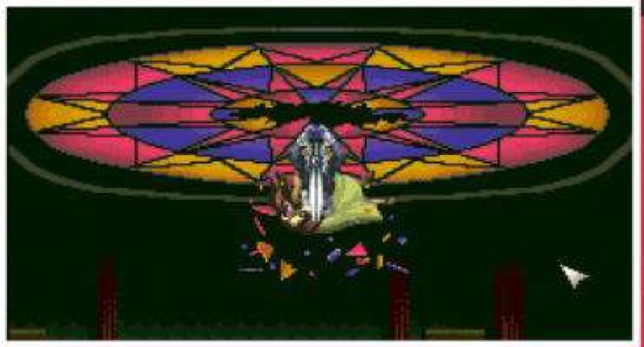
"But the moment the game came out and was released to critical acclaim, they started saying 'I worked on this,'" Kono laughs. And laugh it off he did, because *Clock Tower*'s first release on SNES in 1994 was quite the event indeed. Its success, in fact, encouraged Human Entertainment to create more strange and experimental titles, and also spawned numerous *Clock Tower* sequels.

Even these days, with its old-school graphics and simplistic movement, *Clock Tower* remains terrifying in its original form. This is because it creates its own terrors through its unusual design, atmosphere and narrative – all drenched in strange visions of Seventies horror.

"The most important thing for me was the stillness – nothing happening, just walking down the hallways in complete silence," explains Kono. "The only sound you hear is the echo of footsteps. In creating those moments of stillness, I think I succeeded in making the appearance of Scissorman and the fear of the sound of his scissors more effective. Mr [Koji] Niikura was in charge of the sound direction, and he really demonstrated his superb skills in this extremely important facet of the game."

Indeed, the sound of *Clock Tower* contributes hugely to its legendary atmosphere. Its soundtrack is actually pretty stark – mostly permeating with distant wind ambience and jarring footsteps. There is very little music. However, when *Clock Tower*'s urgent, bombastic and sinister theme *Don't Cry, Jennifer* hits – signalling that the Scissorman has arrived and you must flee – it has all the more impact as a result.


» [Super Famicom] Sometimes you'll reach a dead end, and Scissorman will skewer you on his blades.


» [Super Famicom] Another epic entrance for Scissorman, breaking through stained glass with another dead orphan in tow.

Among its most notable terrors, series mainstay Scissorman – in-game name Bobby – is among the most well-known. "The part about Scissorman being a child was most strongly influenced by *Phenomena*," explains Kono. "However, the idea for his characteristic scissors came from the character Cropsy from *The Burning* [a disfigured maniac holding gardening shears aloft], and *The Eroded Scissors* from Kazuo Umezu's comic, *God's Left Hand, Devil's Right Hand*.

"In *The Eroded Scissors*, there was a scene where scissors burst through the heroine's cheek from the inside of her mouth, and there was this easy-to-imagine, genuine pain about it specifically because it was an everyday item. And that's something that I thought we could convey to players on screen through the medium of videogames. Also, the uncomfortable scraping sound of metallic scissors was very effective in evoking a sense of urgency and the impending danger."

Scissorman's lack of seriousness is part of what's inducted him into the horror villain hall of fame. He creeps on you, steady and repetitive, and if he catches you in his grasp and brutally murders you, he does a little victory dance on your corpse. He's also a constant threat, that can turn up anytime and anywhere.

The scene in the enhanced PlayStation port, *Clock Tower*, where Scissorman is sitting in a rocking chair watching cartoons, is among Kono's favourite scenes of the series. "I think the idea of a killer who innocently laughs at cartoons coming after you has a much more unsettling fear to it than a murderer who's serious."

But more crucial to horror than cheek-splitting antics and little men wielding scissors, is pacing, according to Kono. "It's true for all games, but I think it is especially important for survival horror titles. Those games are fast-paced when you're being chased or fighting monsters, but if they continue without letting up, then the player will grow numb to it," he says. "That then makes the monsters, which should be the focus of their fear, become mere obstacles. To mitigate that as best as possible and keep the monsters terrifying, you should pace things out in waves by periodically having a quiet, slow-paced situation."

He adds that unlike passive media, such as films and television shows, players have a strong degree of free will in videogames, adding a level of complexity to solid pacing. However, it's not the only thing to consider when creating captivating survival videogames.

"Do not rely on the fear of your monster's design," explains Kono. "Simple visual scares are only one pillar of a game. To put it in cooking terms, they are only one ingredient in a dish. So you need to put your heart and soul into how you create an atmosphere as the 'seasoning' that brings those ingredients to life."

He elaborates that the monster designs in *Silent Hill* are superb on their own, but that the radio is actually one of the scariest aspects of the game. "The radio noise itself creates an ominous sense of foreboding, which is substantial in heightening the atmosphere before monsters appear," he says. He advises budding horror game designers to analyse fear as much as they can.

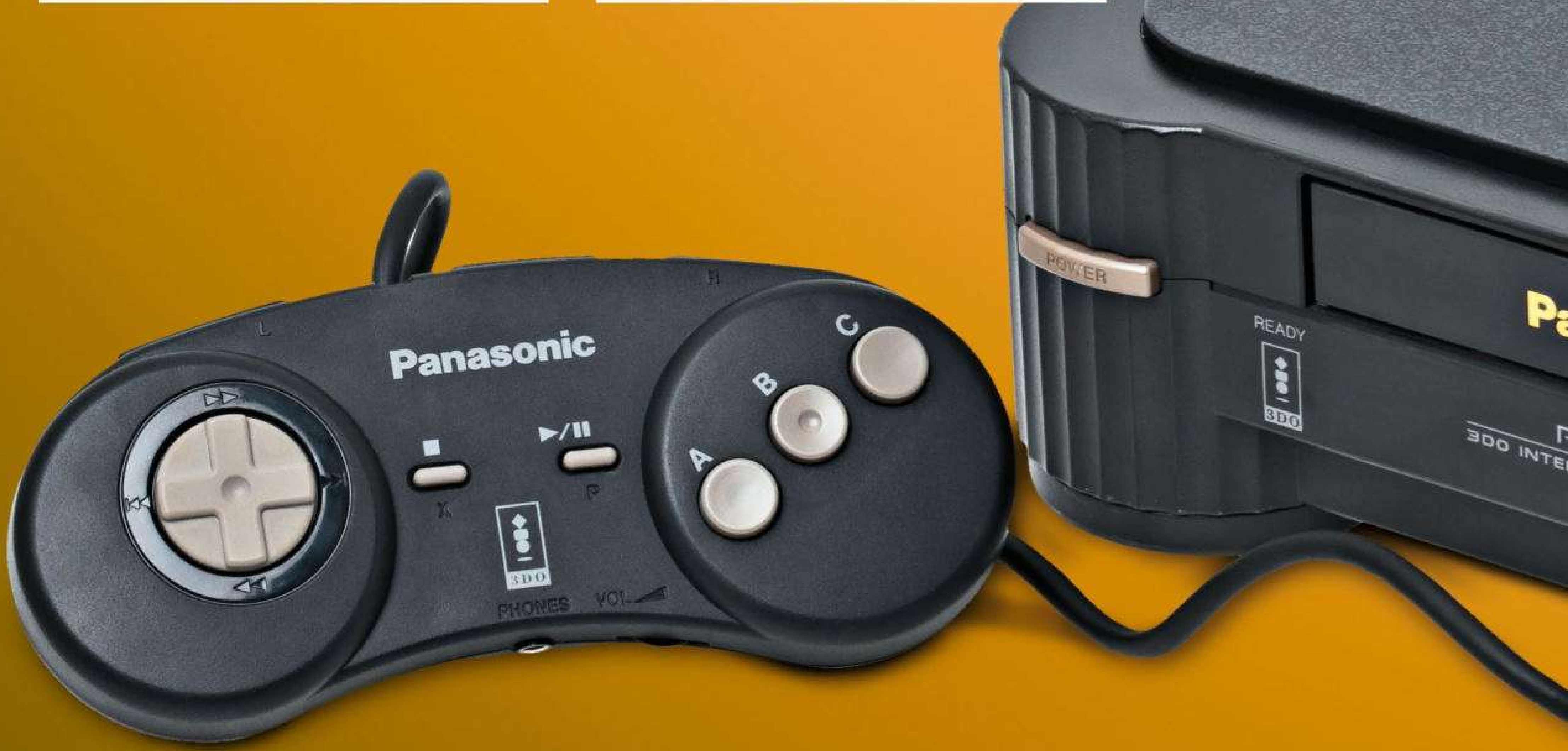
"The word horror can be broken down further into many different genres, each offering its own quality of scares," he continues. "What kind of fear do you want to present? Where does that fear come from? You must always remember that there is no clear, correct answer to these questions.

"For example, a very young child who's frightened will hug their mother. Most of them will face their mother when they do, but some will press their backs up against their mother and face outward," he continues. "Are they afraid of seeing what they fear, or are they more afraid of not being able to see it? Fear is different for each person."

Following on from the huge success of *Clock Tower* and its sequels, Kono, now part of his own Tokyo-based company Nude Maker, is in the process of carefully composing a project he'll be "satisfied with". In particular, Kono would love to start a brand-new horror title.

"However, except for zombies, modern survival horror games have a very difficult time balancing both the size of the market and the increasingly large budgets needed for quality graphics," he concludes. "How we'll solve this, is a major challenge as we continue to move forward." ✱

Panasonic
ACCESS
R·E·A·L
3DO INTERACTIVE MULTIPLAYER
FZ-1
COMPACT disc DIGITAL AUDIO



3DO FZ-1

» MANUFACTURER: Panasonic **» YEAR:** 1993
» COST: £399 (launch), £170+ (today, boxed), £95+ (today, unboxed)

3DO differed from most console companies. Where others wanted to sell hardware to the consumer, 3DO offered a technological standard to hardware manufacturers, which those companies would then sell to the consumers. The idea was that buying a 3DO player would be like buying a video player, hence the name. A few companies signed up to this idea, and one of them was Panasonic.

The FZ-1 was the first of Panasonic's 3DO models, and is arguably the one best recognised by consumers today. The front-loading CD tray and black, understated exterior design of the system are clearly aimed at making it look at home as part of your home entertainment system. The console offers S-video and composite outputs directly, though RGB support is not present as standard, and only a single controller port is needed due to the way 3DO controllers daisy-chain together.

This system's unique manufacturing model was its undoing. Though powerful, the 3DO was also very expensive as Panasonic needed to profit from the hardware, where most manufacturers take a loss and make it up with software royalties. The eye-watering $699 US launch price handicapped it, and more powerful systems showed up as the cost came down. *

SYSTEM SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

Panasonic
R·E·A·L
3DO INTERACTIVE MULTIPLAYER
Panasonic
R·E·A·L
RACTIVE MULTIPLAYER
FZ-1
ACCESS
COMPACT disc DIGITAL AUDIO
OPEN/CLOSE
CONTROLLER
AV-EXPANSION

3DO FZ-1 fact

■ Though the system doesn't feature regional lockouts, some Japanese games don't work on non-Japanese systems due to the absence of a kanji font in the system software.

PROCESSORS: 32-BIT ARM60 (12.5 MHZ)
RAM: 2MB MAIN, 1MB VIDEO
GRAPHICS: CUSTOM CHIPS CLIO AND MADAM (12.5 MHZ, 320X240 RESOLUTION, 24-BIT COLOUR PALETTE, FILL RATE 9-16 MILLION PIXELS PER SECOND)
AUDIO: CUSTOM DSP WITH 13 DIGITAL INPUT CHANNELS, CD AUDIO
MEDIA: 650MB CD-ROM
STORAGE: 32KB BUILT-IN SRAM

ESSENTIAL GAME

Gex

There's nothing more Nineties than a mascot platformer, and every console had one. For 3DO owners, that mascot was Gex, a wisecracking gecko who spent far too much time watching TV. The game takes him through worlds based on various TV tropes, and there's plenty for him to do as he whips baddies with his tail and climbs all over the walls. Though Gex would find his way to other platforms like the Saturn and PlayStation, and even receive 3D sequels elsewhere, the 3DO is his spiritual home and this game was the best-selling title the console ever saw.

0001000
×03
34

SO YOU WANT TO COLLECT...

MEGA DRIVE RPGs

Although often overshadowed by the Super Nintendo's legendary RPG catalogue, Sega's Mega Drive still has plenty to offer (more so if you can understand Japanese). The following 20 gems are worthy of both your time and your collection

Words by Kerry Brunskill

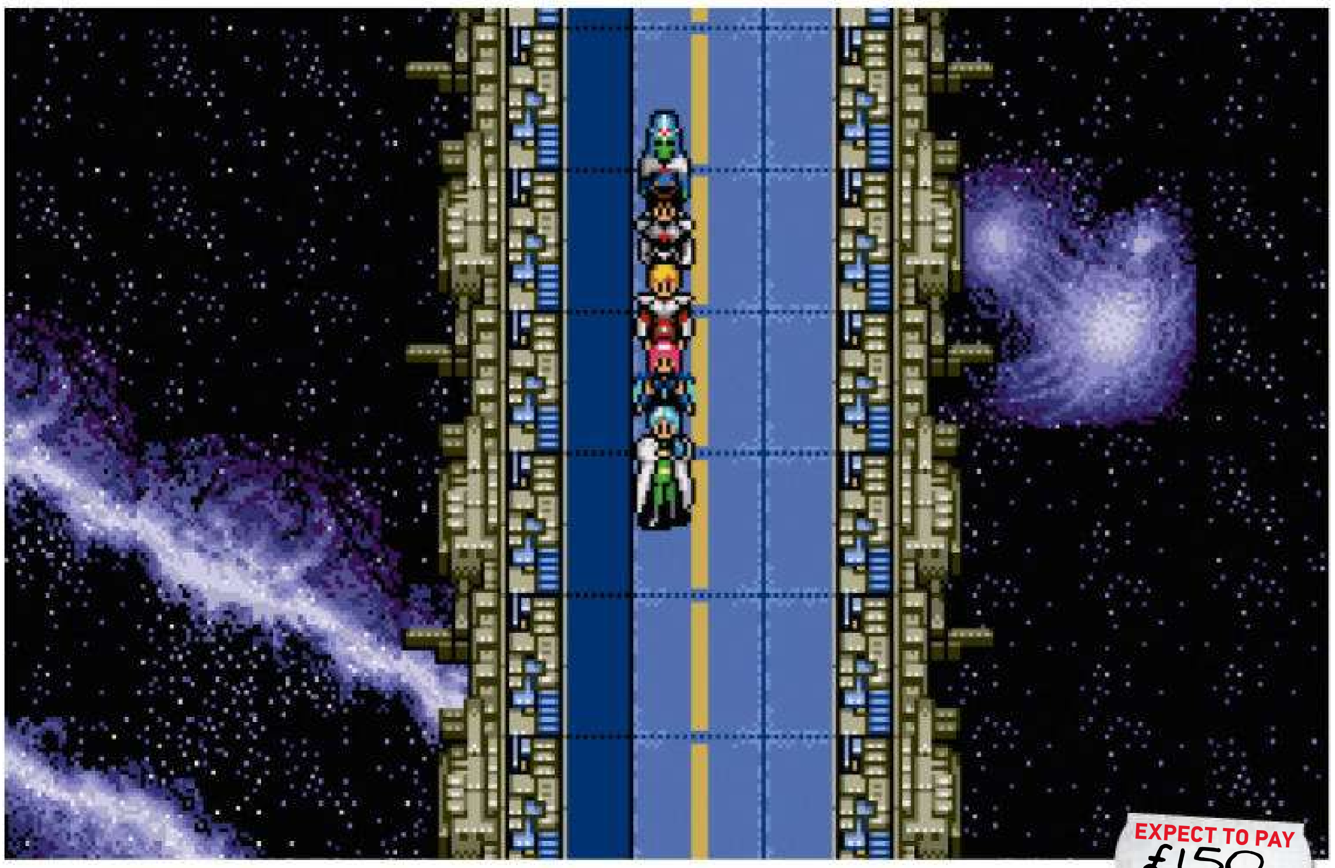
PHINAL PHANTASY

PHANTASY STAR IV

DEVELOPER:	SEGA
RELEASE:	1993

■ Between its enduring quality, initial low print numbers and high RRP the current three-figure resale prices for English copies of Sega's series ender shouldn't come as much of a surprise. Luckily, there's a slight silver lining in knowing there have been several physical and digital re-releases over the years either in dedicated Japanese *Phantasy Star* collections or as part of various Mega Drive bundles, as well as an individual Steam release available for under a pound. iOS and Android devices can even download the game for free (ad supported – a small fee will permanently remove these ads) if you'd like to spend some time with the game before handing over money for a cartridge.

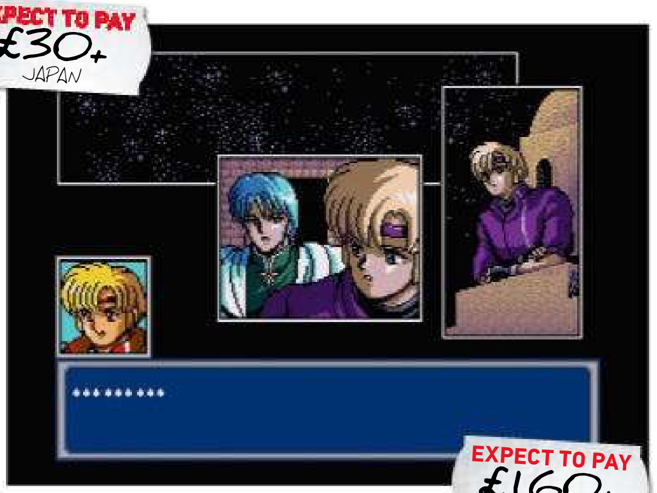
Japanese copies of the game are not only adorned with beautiful artwork but also come with a colour fold-out sheet showing an annotated map of Motavia on one side and a list of magical techniques and special skills on the other (in Japanese). This useful item is included as standard, so a second-hand copy is incomplete if this is missing from yours.



EXPECT TO PAY £150+ EUROPE

» [Mega Drive] As with many RPGs featured here, the Japanese version is cheaper but has a language barrier to consider.

EXPECT TO PAY £30+ JAPAN

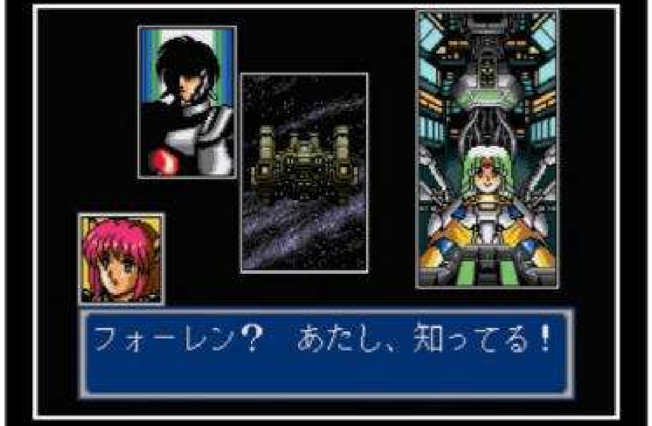


EXPECT TO PAY £160+ USA

» [Mega Drive] Beautiful images like this really help to heighten an already emotional scene.

SCI-FANTASY

How Sega's epic blends genres



フォーレン？　あたし、知ってる！

Phantasy Star IV does a lot of things right, but perhaps the one that tends to go unnoticed most often is how seamlessly it blends hard sci-fi concepts with traditional RPG fantasy. Evil towers rising from the sand, hidden crystalline planets hosting a guiding voice left by godlike beings, and even actual space wizards effortlessly rub shoulders with hidden laboratories growing biological monsters, sentient computers who consider artificially-created 'Numen' their children, and multiple spaceships lying dormant in underground hangars. Your core party has just as many hooded spell-slinging wizards in it as it does gun-toting androids, and along the way they'll be joined by everyone from human academics to alien priests with a penchant for terrible puns. To date there's still nothing quite like it other than its own neon-soaked online successors, and even those don't meld these contrasting concepts with quite the same conviction as this old single-player swansong.

SUPER SPELL-CIAL

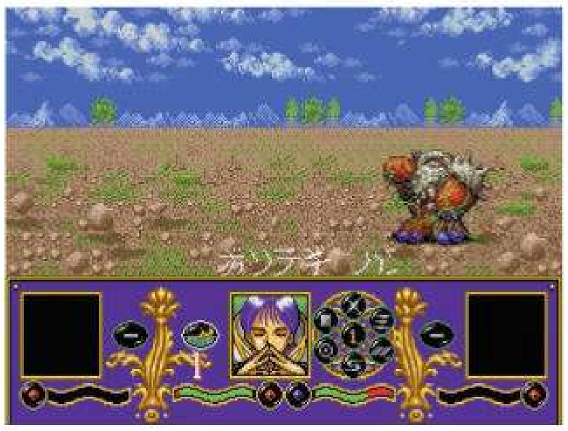
SURGING AURA

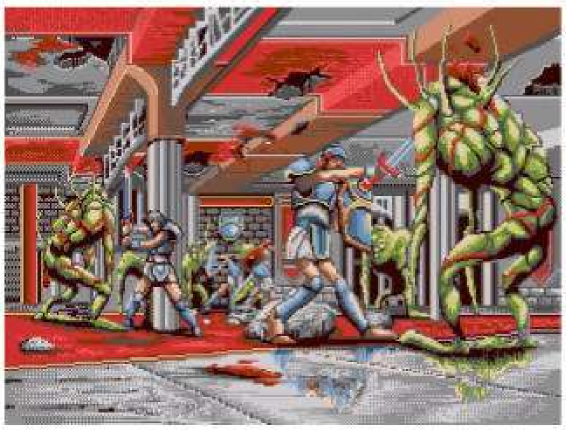
EXPECT TO PAY
£140+
JAPAN

MEGA DRIVE
Surging Aura
SEGA

DEVELOPER: JAPAN MEDIA PROGRAMMING
RELEASE: 1995

As a later Japan-exclusive Mega Drive release and part of Sega's 'Mega Role Play Project' series this has always leaned towards being more expensive than most, however in recent years asking prices have more than doubled even though copies are no more rare than they were before. As unpleasant a thought as it is there's a real chance if this trend continues today's 'ridiculous' resale prices will be considered a bargain in five years' time, so it may be worth biting the bullet now rather than waiting for a drop that, so far, has never come. To be considered complete the box must include a pin badge of Muu standing behind the game's title – do be aware that any yellowing on the clear coating of this will be down to age rather than mistreatment by a previous owner.


» [Mega Drive] Battles play out in real time, spells are chanted to completion.


» [Mega Drive] Full screen pixel art really hammers home the game's dramatic and destructive opening.

LOTTERY WINNERS ONLY

SOLIEL

EXPECT TO PAY
£70+
JAPAN

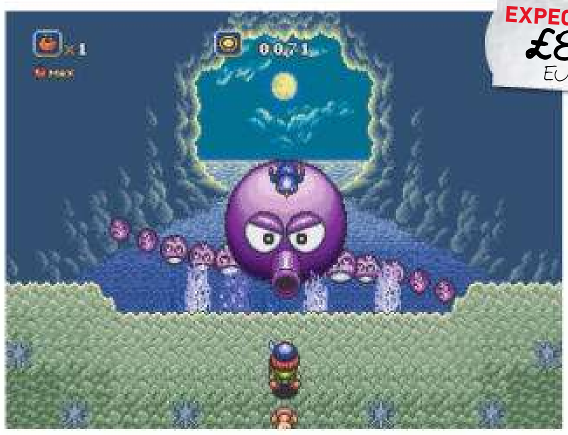
GENESIS
crusader of centy
ATLUS
SEGA

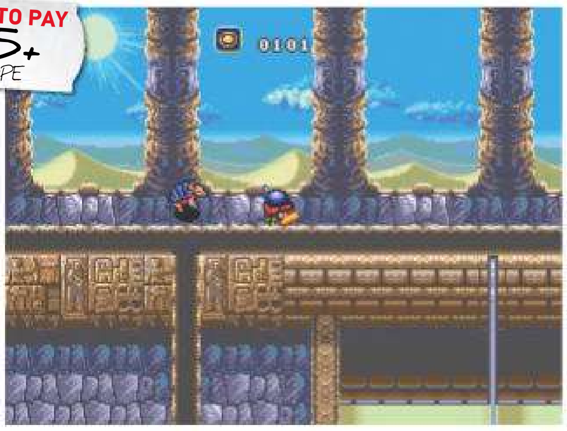
EXPECT TO PAY
£650+
USA

DEVELOPER: NEXTECH
RELEASE: 1994

We'll get the elephant in the room out the way first: no game, no matter how good or how rare, is really worth the vast sums of money US copies of this convention-upending action RPG – known as *Crusader Of Centy* over there – are currently valued at. It's so expensive it actually manages to make the already high prices of the uniquely translated English PAL version (as well as the beautifully presented Japanese original, *Ragnacenty*) look cheap, and to anyone still seriously considering an American purchase we'd suggest saving money by buying a mint-condition Japanese copy and an entire one-to-one course's worth of written language tuition to teach you how to read it instead – we'd be surprised if it cost you more than a complete and immaculate US game did.

EXPECT TO PAY
£85+
EUROPE


» [Mega Drive] *Soliel*'s boss battles are always inventive affairs, and often employ large sprites in conjunction with unique special effects.


» [Mega Drive] The places you explore are often intricately detailed affairs that go beyond forgotten caves and dark holes.

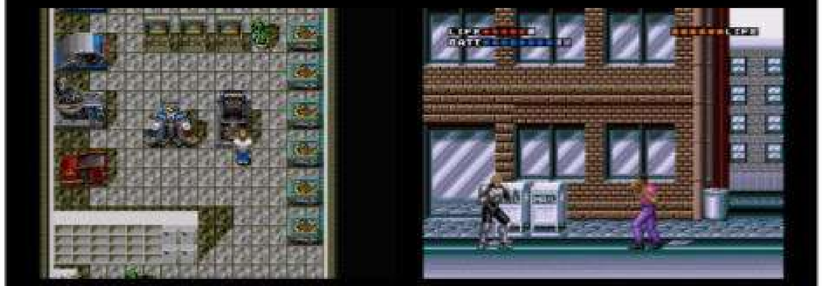
SILLY SEGA SHENANIGANS

RENT A HERO

EXPECT TO PAY
£30+
JAPAN

DEVELOPER: SEGA AM2
RELEASE: 1991

This import-only exclusive may not quite be valued so low that it's within the realms of being impulse-purchase cheap but at least a clean and complete copy of AM2's interesting and experimental mix of humdrum work and battery-powered heroism won't break the bank. Which is odd, because in many ways it should be the perfect target for ardent Mega Drive fans: the game opens with an epic battle against your dad dressed up as definitely-not-Godzilla in your living room and only gets even more Sega from there using an intriguing combination of traditional RPG chatting, copious Sega references, and side-on beat-'em-up action. We'd recommend snapping up a copy of this one before everyone else starts to notice it. The later Dreamcast/Xbox game is a similar-but-different remake with updated references and an expanded story, complimenting rather than replacing the original.

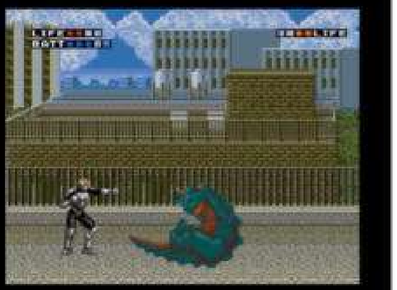

» [Mega Drive] How many games can you recognise within this virtual arcade?

PARODY CENTRAL

Sega's game likes to poke fun…

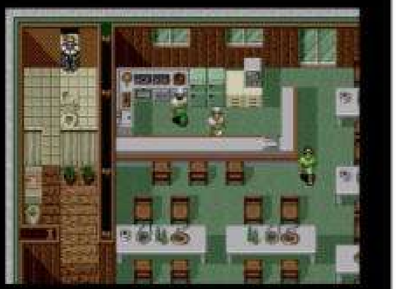
Not-Godzilla

Any similarities to any other green-hued kaiju famous for saving/destroying Tokyo, living or dead, are entirely coincidental. Honest. Luckily for our battery-powered hero the only examples of terrifying lizard fury he ever has to battle are nothing worse than a man in a suit for the benefit of a cheering crowd of children.



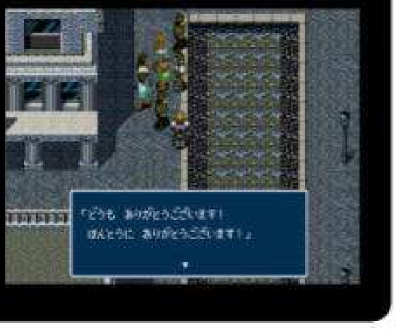
Not-Sega

Your suit is rented from SECA, expertly hidden by a special SEnsational CAfe – a play on the name of a certain SErvice GAmes – accessing its secret research facility through the cafe itself… or more accurately, through a secret door behind the cafe's toilet. Being a hero for hire was never going to be glamorous work.



Not-Rent A Hero

This game is so keen on packing in the parodies it even finds the time to poke fun at itself, introducing a similarly-suited rival along the way – the modestly-titled 'Ultra Great Super Strong Fighting Salaryman'. As you'd expect from the name their only goal is to make you look like the comedy sidekick to their glossy heroism.



COLLECTING TIPS!

Mod your Mega Drive
Some careful soldering and a little cart slot modification can make a Mega Drive truly region free – and even force slow PAL games to run at 60Hz.

Feel free
Many early Mega Drive games are region free – you're generally safe with releases from 1991 or before, but even later titles may not perform a territory check.

Know your market
'Mega Role Play Project' Mega Drive titles with a thin yellow banner on the front of the box are incomplete without their matching pin badge.

Eyes peeled
Counterfeit copies are common: avoid reproductions, suspiciously cheap cart-only auctions, and always check insert and label art against a Google search.

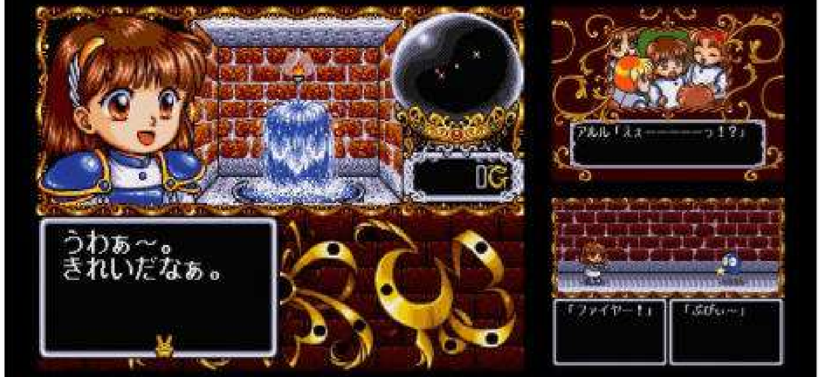
TRIPLE TROUBLE

MADOU MONOGATARI

EXPECT TO PAY
£120+
JAPAN

DEVELOPER: COMPILE
RELEASE: 1996

As the final official Japanese Mega Drive game this is more than another remake of a great dungeon crawler from the creators of *Puyo Puyo*, it's a defined point in gaming history and a high quality send-off for Sega's 16-bit hardware. For all these reasons and more this makes it one of the more expensive RPGs on the system, but also one that's more likely than most to hold its value over time as it's unlikely Sega is ever going to officially release any more Mega Drive games. Being visual-led and using fighting style commands for magic spells also helps to make young Arle's journey through the tower more import-friendly than most Japanese language RPGs.



» [Mega Drive] Arle's gigantic portrait is actually her health bar: if she looks happy, she's alright.

BEFORE PUYO PUYO

What happened before the puzzles?

Arle's earliest adventure debuted on the MSX in 1990 and from that successful starting point found itself ported, remade and re-imagined for many of the most popular formats around at the time. Some leaned in on the inherent cuteness of magical girls battling gooey puyos, while others were at times shockingly dark when compared to later cheery entries in the series. All however retained the first-person dungeon exploration and the expressive portrait of the game's heroine.

A THOR WALLET

THE STORY OF THOR: A SUCCESSOR OF THE LIGHT

EXPECT TO PAY
£50+
EUROPE

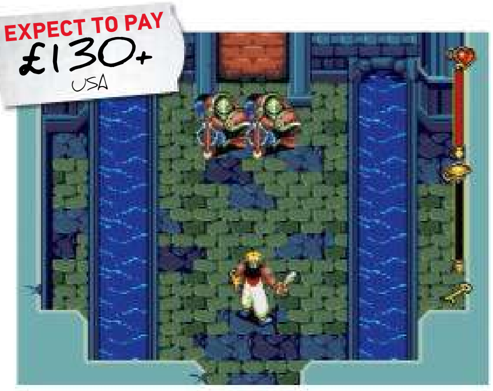
DEVELOPER: ANCIENT
RELEASE: 1994

MEGA DRIVE
The Story of Thor

EXPECT TO PAY
£50+
JAPAN

Gain the assistance of the spirits of water, fire, earth and shadow to defeat the master of the silver armlet in this smoothly animated action RPG from Yuzo Koshiro and friends that was known at the time for using d-pad inputs that wouldn't look out of place in a fighting game. It's not cheap in any region, but at least current PAL/Japanese prices put it more at the 'birthday treat' end of the scale than the triple-figure US release (titled *Beyond Oasis* there). It has been steadily creeping up in value though, so don't wait too long to buy a physical copy. If those prices are too much this excellent game can frequently be had for pennies in various online sales on multiple home formats, and can literally be acquired for free (with ads) on iOS and Android devices at any time. Do keep in mind the Japanese release is incomplete without its pin badge before buying.

EXPECT TO PAY
£130+
USA



» [Mega Drive] Quick thinking is often just as crucial to your success as puzzle solving.

CHEAP IN JAPAN

LANGRISSER

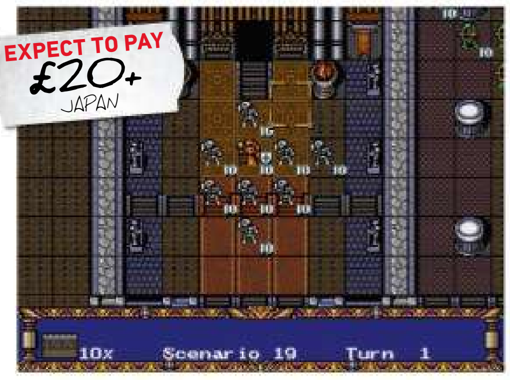
EXPECT TO PAY
£70+
US

Mega Drive Cartridge
ラングリッサー

DEVELOPER: MASAYA GAMES
RELEASE: 1991

If you're not overly concerned with condition, slightly dog-eared but still complete Japanese copies of this tactical RPG can often be bought very cheaply, and with a little bit of luck, may even come bundled with the game's equally inexpensive sequel too. The game was retitled *Warsong* for the US release and given an off-puttingly generic cover to crudely try to hide its international origins: this version is many times more expensive than the original but on balance still costs much less than some of the genre's other Mega Drive offerings, and although the localisation changes to some names and the 'de-animed' portraits on a few key characters are not ideal they do cement this old release's position as a unique take on Masaya's fantasy classic that still has its own retro charms even in the face of the mirror-polished modern remake.

EXPECT TO PAY
£20+
JAPAN



» [Mega Drive] Important enemy generals are often well protected by hordes of underlings.

MORE GAMES TO CONSIDER

SWORD OF VERMILION

DEVELOPER: SEGA AM2
RELEASED: 1989
EXPECT TO PAY
EUROPE **£25+**, US **£18+**, JAPAN **£15+**

LANDSTALKER

DEVELOPER: CLIMAX ENTERTAINMENT
RELEASED: 1992
EXPECT TO PAY
EUROPE **£40+**, US **£45+**, JAPAN **£15+**

MASTER OF MONSTERS

DEVELOPER: SYSTEMSOFT
RELEASED: 1991
EXPECT TO PAY
£US **£90+**, JAPAN **£15+**

LIGHT CRUSADER

DEVELOPER: TREASURE
RELEASED: 1995
EXPECT TO PAY
EUROPE **£120+**, US **£35+**, JAPAN **£30+**

YS III: WANDERERS FROM YS

DEVELOPER: TELENET JAPAN
RELEASED: 1991
EXPECT TO PAY
US **£90+**, JAPAN **£130+**

A BRIGHT LIGHT

SHINING IN THE DARKNESS

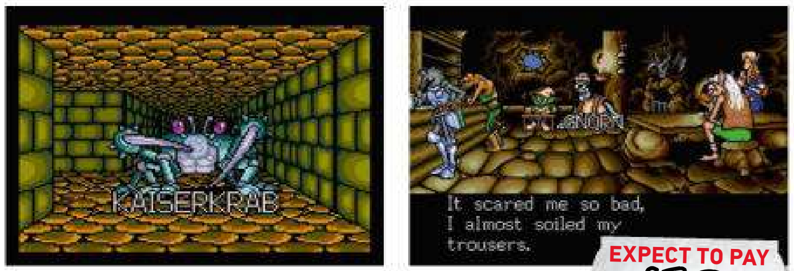
EXPECT TO PAY £40+ EUROPE

MEGA DRIVE
Shining in the Darkness
16-BIT CARTRIDGE

EXPECT TO PAY £10+ JAPAN

DEVELOPER: CLIMAX ENTERTAINMENT
RELEASE: 1991

■ Given the almost universal cheapness of this title when compared to most other Mega Drive RPGs you'd be forgiven for thinking there was something wrong with the game, but this first entry in Sega's magnificent *Shining* series is a graphically stunning and fair dungeon crawler with a surprisingly excellent English translation that still reads well today. At the time of writing, Japanese prices are so low it's almost worth picking up a spare just to enjoy the beautiful full-colour manual artwork, and the English language versions should be snapped up quickly purely on the quality of the game alone. As with many other Sega classics this has frequently been bundled in various digital compilations if you'd like to try before you commit to buying a boxed copy.



It scared me so bad,
I almost soiled my
trousers.

» [Mega Drive] Many monster appearances are context-sensitive, and use a dedicated introduction animation before a fight.

EXPECT TO PAY £30+ USA

NOT THAT SONIC

SHINING FORCE II

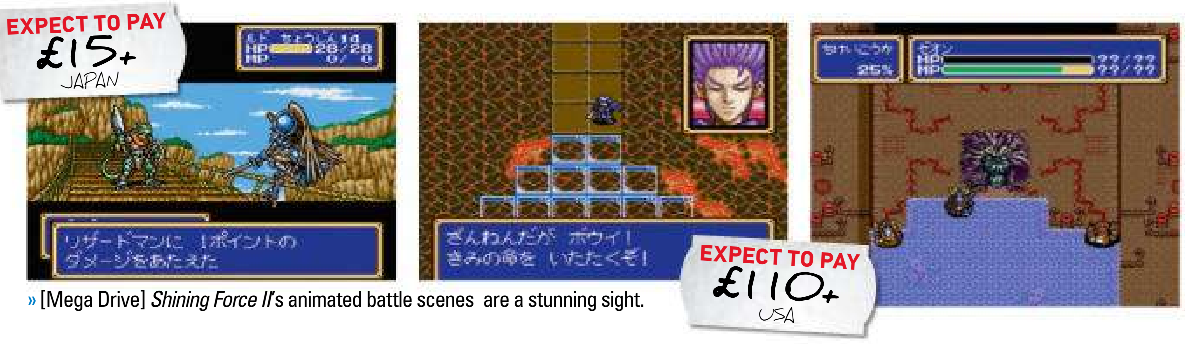
MEGA DRIVE
SHINING FORCE II
SEGA

EXPECT TO PAY £100+ EUROPE

DEVELOPER: SONIC! SOFTWARE PLANNING
RELEASE: 1993

■ PAL copies of this polished and entertaining strategy RPG have always been hard to find even around the game's release, so in some ways the current resale value actually feels quite reasonable. The US version falls along similar rarity lines, and while inflated when compared to its original 1991 sale price it's not yet tipped over into being utterly ridiculous. As is often the case Japanese copies can be easily picked up for very little – so little in fact the game makes for a great first purchase for the import-curious, and rewards those who do not only with an eye-catching cover and an artwork-heavy manual but also a double-sided fold-out sheet, one side showing a map of the world and the other a handy quick reference list of spells, items and class promotions (in Japanese, of course).

EXPECT TO PAY £15+ JAPAN



リザードマンに 1ポイントの
ダメージをあたえた

ざんねんだが ボウイ!
きみの命を いただくぞ!

» [Mega Drive] *Shining Force II*'s animated battle scenes are a stunning sight.

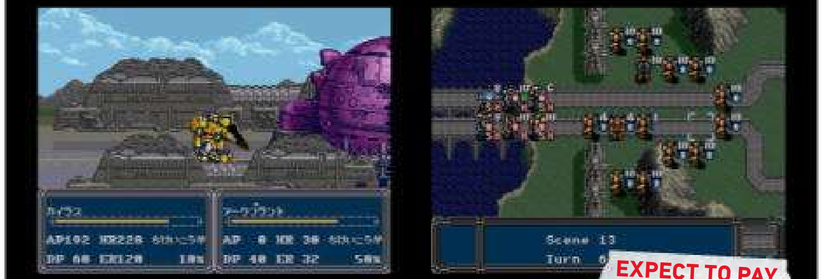
EXPECT TO PAY £110+ USA

MECHTACULAR

VIXEN 357

DEVELOPER: NCS CORP
RELEASE: 1992

■ '*Langrisser* with mechs' isn't an entirely accurate description of this engagingly tactical Japanese exclusive but it's close enough to help anyone with a strong opinion of Masaya's long-lived fantasy strategy series decide whether they'd consider the middlingly-expensive price of this game something that'd be worth spending their money on. The self-contained and linear nature of this title's maps means it's relatively easy for language-limited importers to grasp – and that in turn makes its consistently mild resale prices something of a mystery, especially considering its continued Mega Drive exclusivity. This is definitely one for general Mega Drive collectors to keep a close eye on, and genre fans to grab sooner rather than later before everyone decides it's an overlooked gem.



» [Mega Drive] Battle cutscenes always accurately reflect the location, enemy, and even the weapons being held.

EXPECT TO PAY £40+ JAPAN

BACK TO THE FUTURE

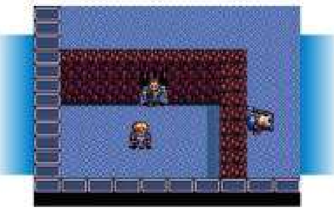
More mechanical mayhem to explore

Hisou Kihei X-Serd

Vixen 357 wasn't the first time NCS meddled with mechs – this earlier work for the PC Engine, so old it uses password saves, is where much of the later strategy game's foundations were laid out before being expanded upon for the Mega Drive release.

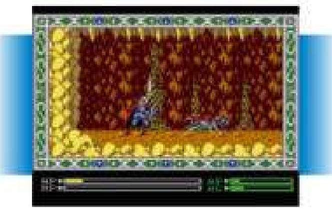
Gaia No Monshou

Going even further back to 1987 this strategy title by the same developer, available on a selection of old Japanese computers as well as the PC Engine, has hidden amongst its swords and sorcery an extra scenario featuring jeeps, tanks and helicopters – a small taste of the sci-fi future to come.



DRAGON SLAYER: THE LEGEND OF HEROES

DEVELOPER: SEGA FALCOM
RELEASED: 1994
EXPECT TO PAY
JAPAN **£70+**



EXILE

DEVELOPER: RIOT
RELEASED: 1991
EXPECT TO PAY
US **£90+**, JAPAN **£30+**

SHADOWRUN

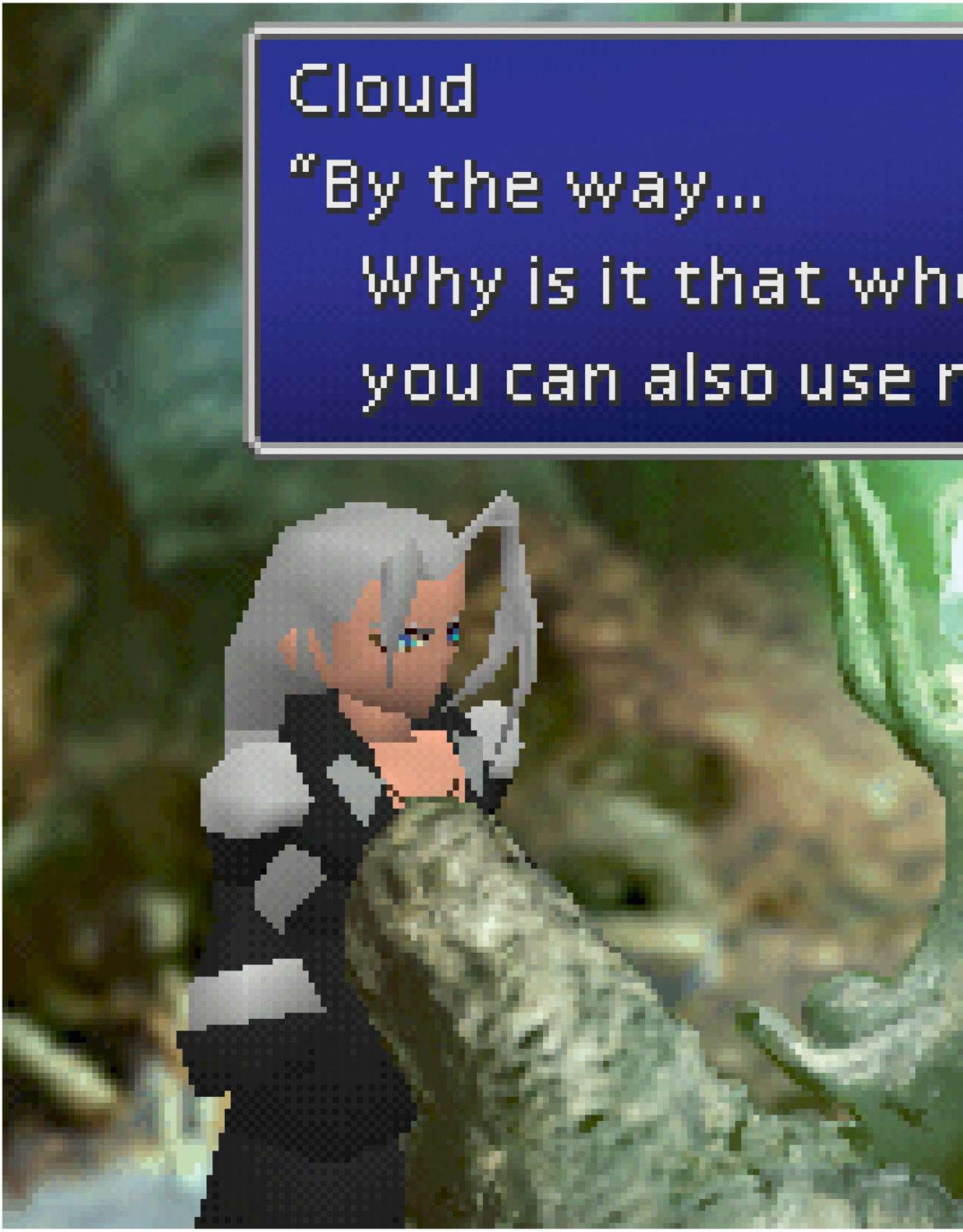
DEVELOPER: BLUESKY SOFTWARE
RELEASED: 1994
EXPECT TO PAY
US **£70+**

SORCERIAN

DEVELOPER: FALCOM
RELEASED: 1990
EXPECT TO PAY
JAPAN **£10+**

FATAL LABYRINTH

DEVELOPER: SEGA
RELEASED: 1990
EXPECT TO PAY
EUROPE **£15+**, US **£15+**



Cloud
"By the way...
Why is it that wh
you can also use r

"en you use materia
nagic too?"

Final Fantasy VII

NEVER SAY NEVER

» PlayStation » 1997 » Squaresoft

There was a time in my life when *Final Fantasy VII* was more than a game – it was an obsession. After picking it up with money I earned by mowing lawns, I allowed myself to be fully absorbed in the story of Cloud's fateful encounter with Avalanche and everything that followed. The cinematic ambition was like nothing I'd ever seen before, and despite some translation deficiencies that are much more obvious in hindsight, the plot kept me gripped. I laughed at encounters with the Turks, I spent far too long trying to beat Gi Nattak in Cosmo Canyon, and I cursed Sephiroth for his dastardly deeds despite knowing full well that they were coming. Such was my fixation with the game that I took my PlayStation on holiday with me that year, and got my golden chocobo while I was on the trip. *Final Fantasy VII* is an experience I treasured from start to finish.

As much affection as I hold for *Final Fantasy VII*, I've never had the desire to replay it. It's just too big, too daunting to take on again. I find myself put off by lengthy games in general, even if they're new ones I want to experience for the first time – never mind a replay. The likes of *Advent Children*, *Crisis Core* and *Dirge Of Cerberus* featured the characters I'd grown so attached to, but they never quite hit the same spot and convinced me that the much desired remake was actually a bad idea. Even so, for a long time I was convinced that I'd never revisit that original tale, though I always kept my copy of the game just in case.

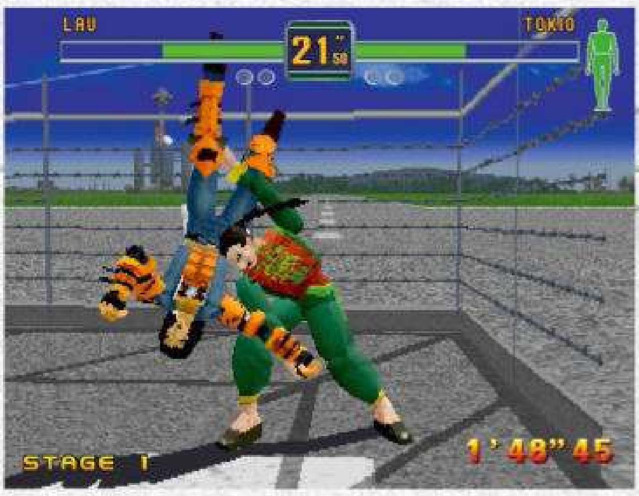
I was wrong. I recently received *Final Fantasy VII Remake* as a gift, and the Mako reactor assault felt as impressive as the original all those years ago. New takes on familiar locations and musical themes instantly reignited my passion for *Final Fantasy VII*, and it felt like I was home again. Perversely, I even feel like drawing a comparison between the two experiences might finally be what gets me to revisit the original. We'll see! *

ULTIMATE GUIDE

FIGHTERS MEGAMIX

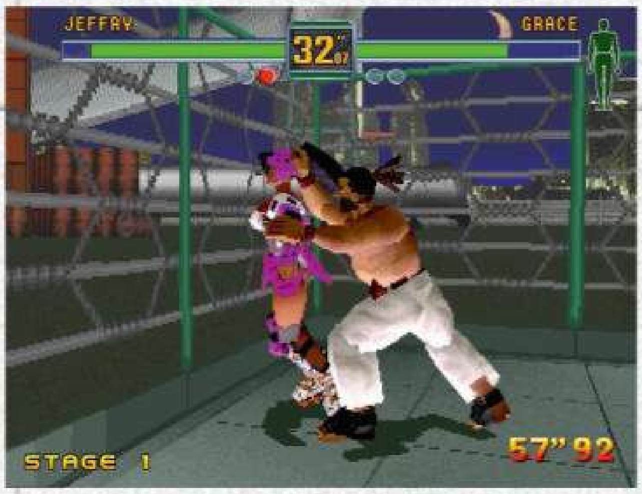
NOT CONTENT WITH MAKING TWO OF THE BEST 3D FIGHTERS OF THE MID-NINETIES, AM2 SMASHED THEM TOGETHER AND SPRINKLED IN OTHER GAMES TO CREATE A CROSSOVER CLASSIC FOR SATURN FANS EVERYWHERE. WE EXPLAIN WHY IT'S STILL WORTH JOINING THE FIGHT

WORDS BY
NICK THORPE



» [Saturn] Lau dumps Tokio on his head with a classic throw from his original move set.

» [Saturn] Jeffry uses a new wall throw, grinding Grace's face against the fence before kneeing her.

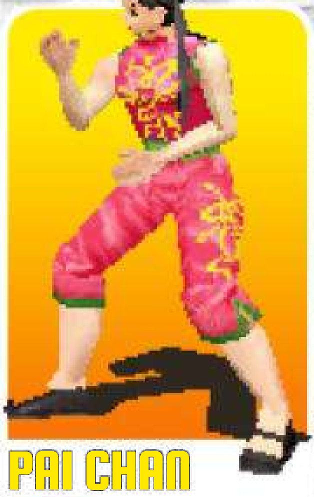


WHO'S WHO

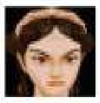
HERE ARE THE 22 STANDARD CHARACTERS, FOR THOSE OF YOU THAT HAVE YET TO MEET THEM

AKIRA YUKI

He looks like a 'standard karate guy' but the face of *Virtua Fighter* is quite difficult to get to grips with. He's very powerful when you do, though.



PAI CHAN



Hong Kong action-movie star Pai is fast and possesses devastating strikes, as well as the ability to intercept and counter attacks.

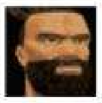
LAU CHAN

Pai's dad is a chef who fights quite similarly to his daughter – he's a touch slower though, but he does has a better range of throwing attacks.

WOLF HAWKFIELD

As a pro wrestler, Wolf specialises in grappling attacks including a variety of suplexes and the utterly murderous giant swing.

JEFFRY MCWILD



This rugged Australian fisherman is a powerhouse grappler who practices the ancient Greco-Roman fighting art of pancratium.

KAGE-MARU

Virtua Fighter's resident ninja is a tricky fighter to deal with, as his unusual striking movements make his attacks incredibly difficult to predict.

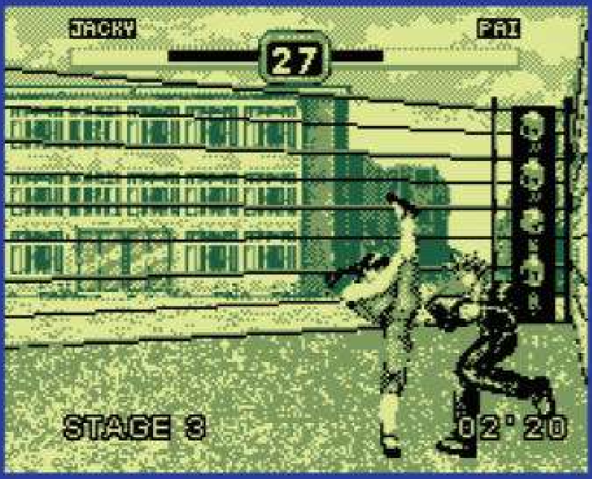
It seems that people can't get enough of crossovers, and we totally understand why – at a fundamental level, they act as wish fulfilment. Whether it's something minor like seeing how Link would fare against the *Soulcalibur* cast or a full-blown event allowing the X-Men to scrap with the *Street Fighter* crew, a good crossover gives you the chance to explore every fantasy scenario you've dreamed up. Back in 1996, AM2 managed to deliver one of the best with *Fighters Megamix*, a dream game for Saturn owners that incorporated elements from across the legendary developer's work.

To understand why this crossover happened, you need some context on the Japanese arcade scene of the mid-Nineties, and how it related to the Saturn. The fighting-game boom was in full effect, and it's hard to overstate how important conversions of AM2's arcade fighting games were in Japan. At launch, *Virtua Fighter* sold with the console at a nearly 1:1 ratio, and ultimately sold over 711,000 copies, while the sequel sold over 1.7 million copies in Japan alone to became the Saturn's best-selling game ever. The flashier, more outlandish *Fighting Vipers* rocketed out of the gates with over a quarter of a million copies sold in its first week, and sold over 460,000 copies overall. At the same time, SNK was doing big business with its own crossover fighting series *The King Of Fighters*, and in September of 1996 Capcom introduced *X-Men Vs Street Fighter*.

The foundation for *Fighters Megamix* is a crossover pitting *Virtua Fighter 2*'s cast against the combatants of *Fighting Vipers*, for an initial roster of 22 characters – notably including Dural, Mahler, BM and Kumachan, all unlockable fighters in their own games. In terms of game style, elements from both games have been included. ▶

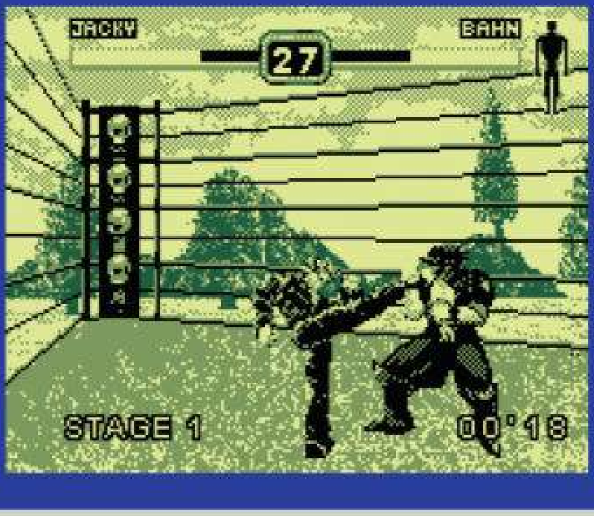
CONVERSiON CAPERS

SEGA'S CROSSOVER SPECTACULAR ALSO MADE ITS WAY TO TIGER'S GAME.COM HANDHELD, AND IT'S EXACTLY AS BAD AS YOU FEARED



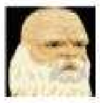
■ ***Fighters Megamix* wasn't a widely ported game, but that's to be expected.** With the game positioned as a Saturn exclusive, it's no surprise that it didn't receive ports to any contemporary consoles. Slightly more surprising is the fact that it didn't hit the PC – Sega invested in the platform during the Nineties and plenty of Saturn games, including fighters like *Virtua Fighter 2* and *Last Bronx*, did make their way to Windows.

Though Sega's own involvement in the handheld market had ended, its established licensing partnership with Tiger Electronics allowed for a couple of Saturn games to appear on the Game.com handheld. *Fighters Megamix* was one of them, and predictably it needed to be cut down considerably. Only 12 characters are available – Akira, Pai, Lion and Jacky from *Virtua Fighter*, Bahn, Honey, Sanman and Mahler from *Fighting Vipers*, plus Kids Sarah, Janet, Siba and the Hornet. The game takes place on a 2D plane and all the arenas are walled. Music consists mostly of plinks and plonks, along with the odd piece of sampled victory music. The unique structure of the single player courses does come across intact though, and it's possible to play with a friend if you have a link cable.



Unfortunately, the Game.com is a notoriously weak piece of hardware, wholly unsuited to hosting action games. Fighters barely have any moves to speak of, and degrade into a blurry mess whenever they move due to the system's poor-quality LCD display. Previous attempts to adapt *Virtua Fighter* for 2D hardware, such as *Virtua Fighter Animation* and *Virtua Fighter 2* for the Mega Drive, feel like masterpieces by comparison. We can't really blame the developers for the state of *Fighters Megamix* though, given what they had to work with – the system's other fighting game, *Mortal Kombat Trilogy*, is no better.

SHUN DI



The oldest fighter on the roster is a nightmare to read, as his drunken kung fu attacks are very odd and get stronger as he drinks.

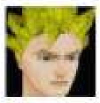
LION RAFALE

A teenage aristocrat from France, trained in praying mantis kung fu. His low stance and sudden attacks can easily wrong-foot you.

SARAH BRYANT

This brainwashed battler is under the control of the evil J6 organisation, and possesses lightning fast kicks to take out her targets with skill.

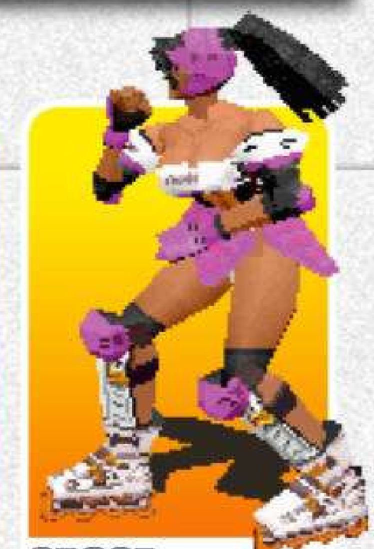
JACKY BRYANT



This Indy Car driver is Sarah's older brother, and he's fighting to restore her freedom. He uses Bruce Lee's martial art, jeet kune do.

DURAL

Virtua Fighter's final boss draws attacks from every character in her game, and can therefore string together some terrifying combos.



GRACE

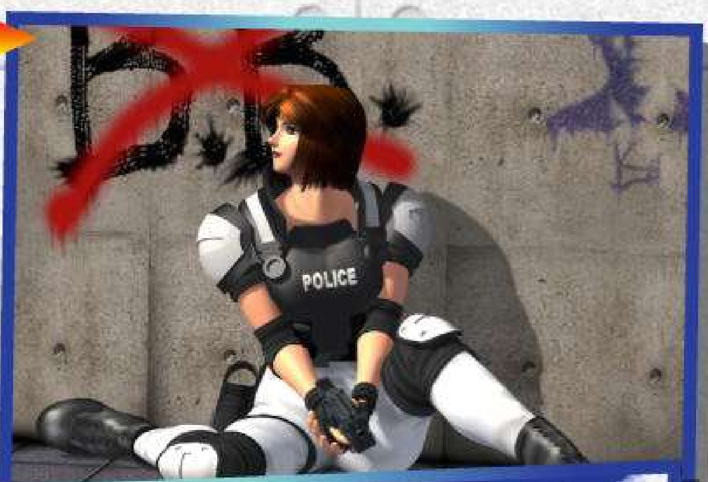
This in-line skater from *Fighting Vipers* is also a fashion model, and possesses the ability to string together deadly low spinning kicks.

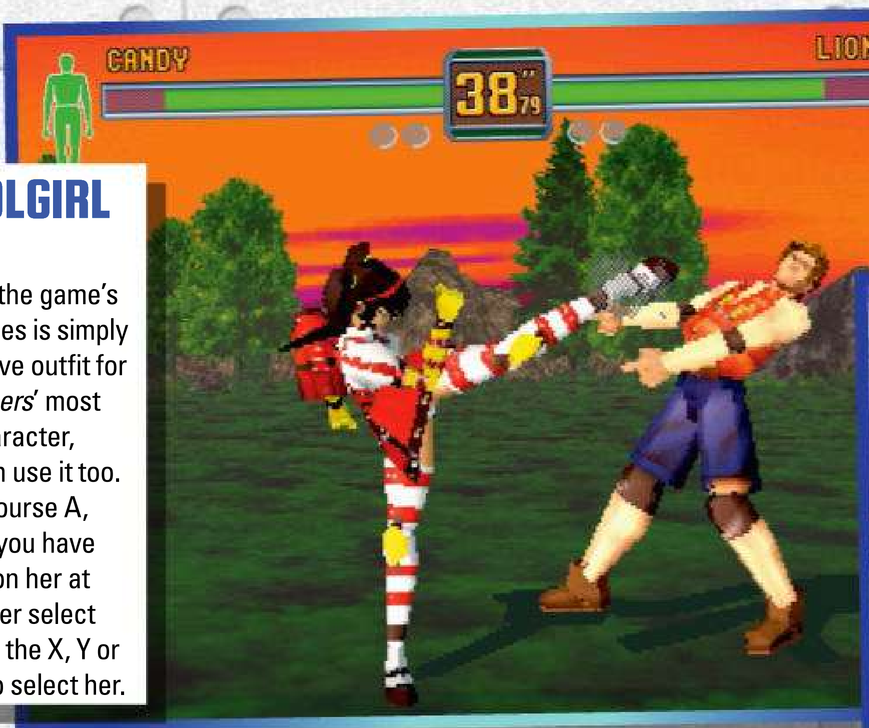
SENSATIONAL SECRETS

FIGHTERS MEGAMIX HAS EVEN MORE TO SEE AND DO THAN YOU'D GUESS AT FIRST GLANCE

MEMORY GAME

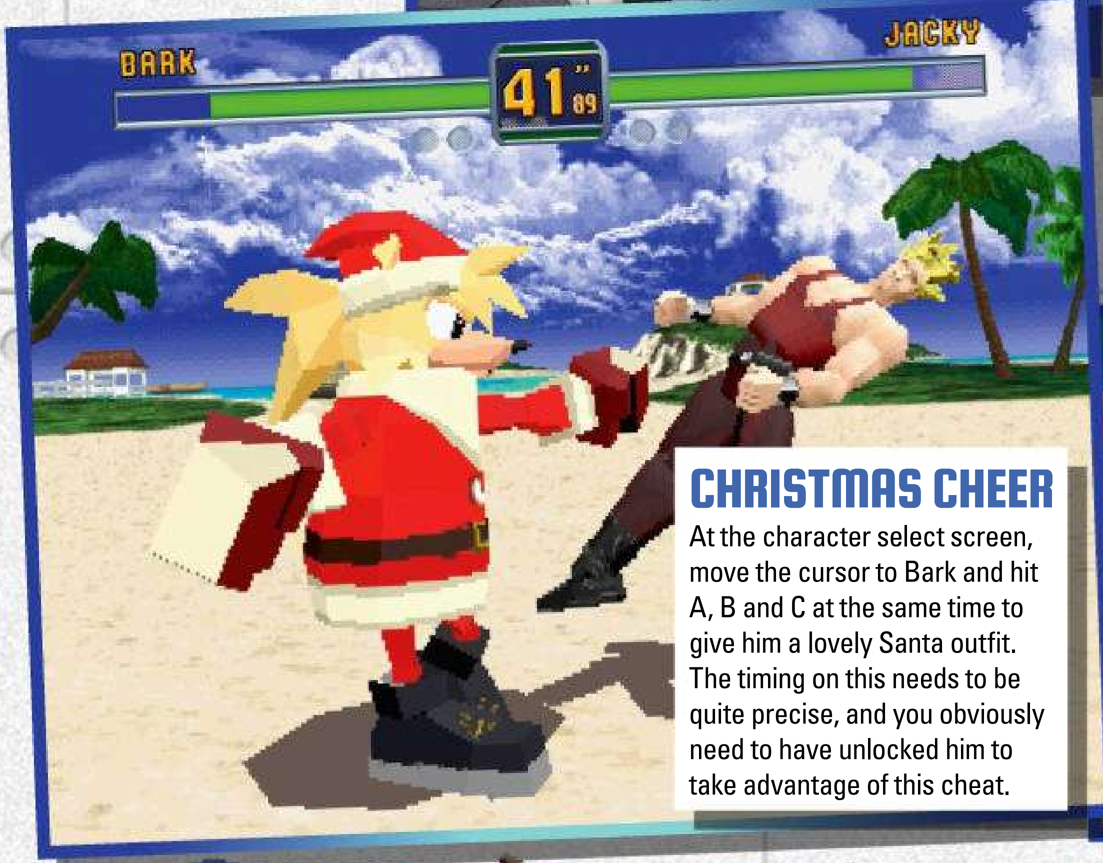
Starting from a fresh save, beat courses A-H and accumulate 1,200 check marks in Training mode. Once you've done that, hit L with course I selected for a secret memory game. Win it and you'll see Janet in various states of undress. This was cut out of the North American release.





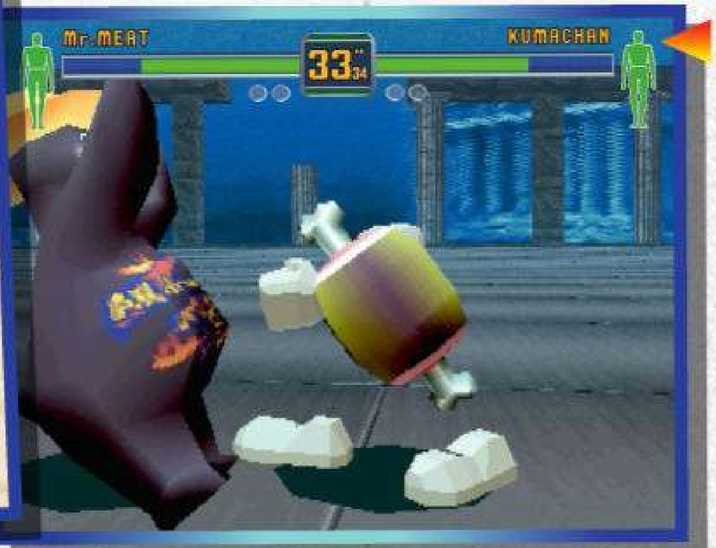
SCHOOLGIRL HONEY

The first of the game's secret bosses is simply an alternative outfit for *Fighting Vipers*' most popular character, and you can use it too. Just beat course A, then when you have the cursor on her at the character select screen, use the X, Y or Z buttons to select her.



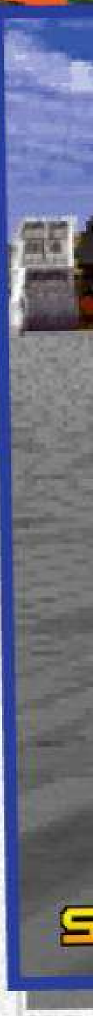
CHRISTMAS CHEER

At the character select screen, move the cursor to Bark and hit A, B and C at the same time to give him a lovely Santa outfit. The timing on this needs to be quite precise, and you obviously need to have unlocked him to take advantage of this cheat.



MEAT MAN

To use this one, you'll need to have started the game at least 30 times. Go to the character select screen, move the cursor to Kumachan and select him with the X button to fight as a piece of meat. If you've played for 84 hours or more, press Z instead to be the AM2 tree.



BAHN

You wouldn't guess that this guy is only 17 years old. He's on a quest to find his absentee dad and challenge him to a fight.

RAXEL

This hair metal guitarist brings his instrument of choice into battle with him, and won't hesitate to use it if he sees a chance.

TOKIO

This guy used to run a street gang, but a member's death caused him to leave in guilt. He's just fighting to have a good time.

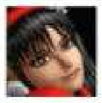
SANMAN

The big boy of the *Fighting Vipers* cast is something of a mystery, but he can roll up his opponents and bowl them into the walls.

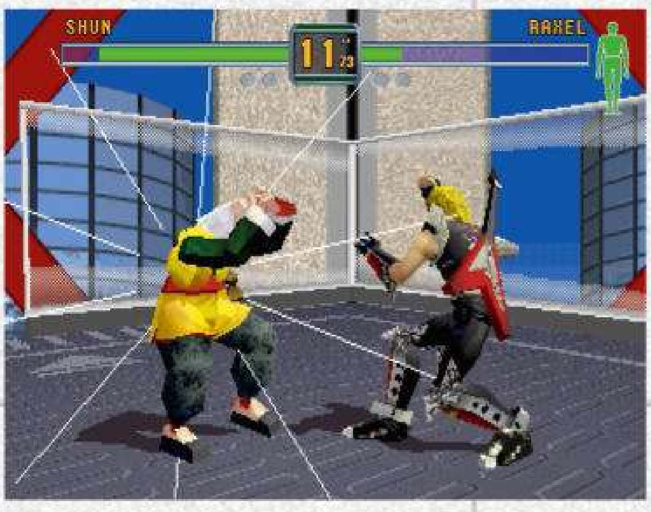
JANE

The most muscular woman on the roster got kicked out of the Navy after fighting too much, and now seeks to prove her strength.

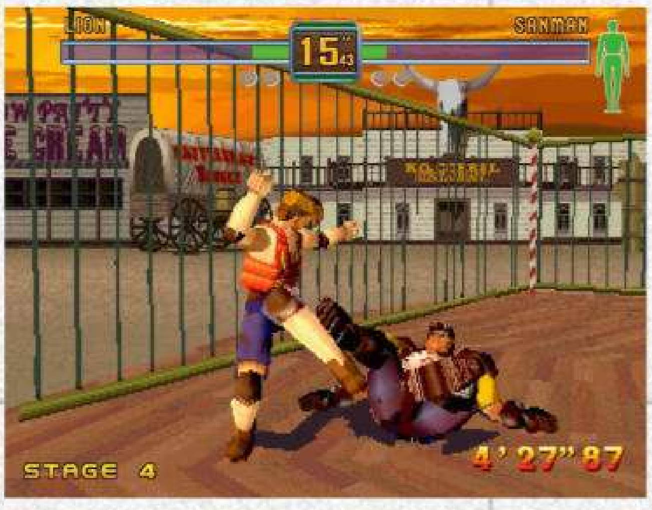
CANDY/HONEY



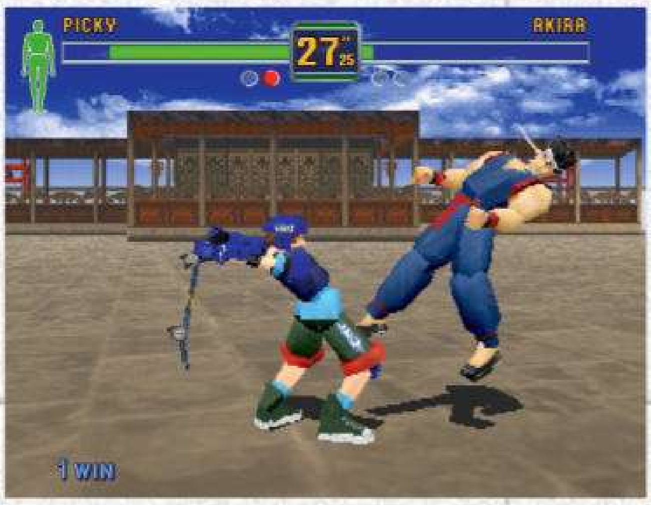
This fashion student wears a plastic dress of her own design in battle, and utilises strikes with an odd, almost cat-like motion.



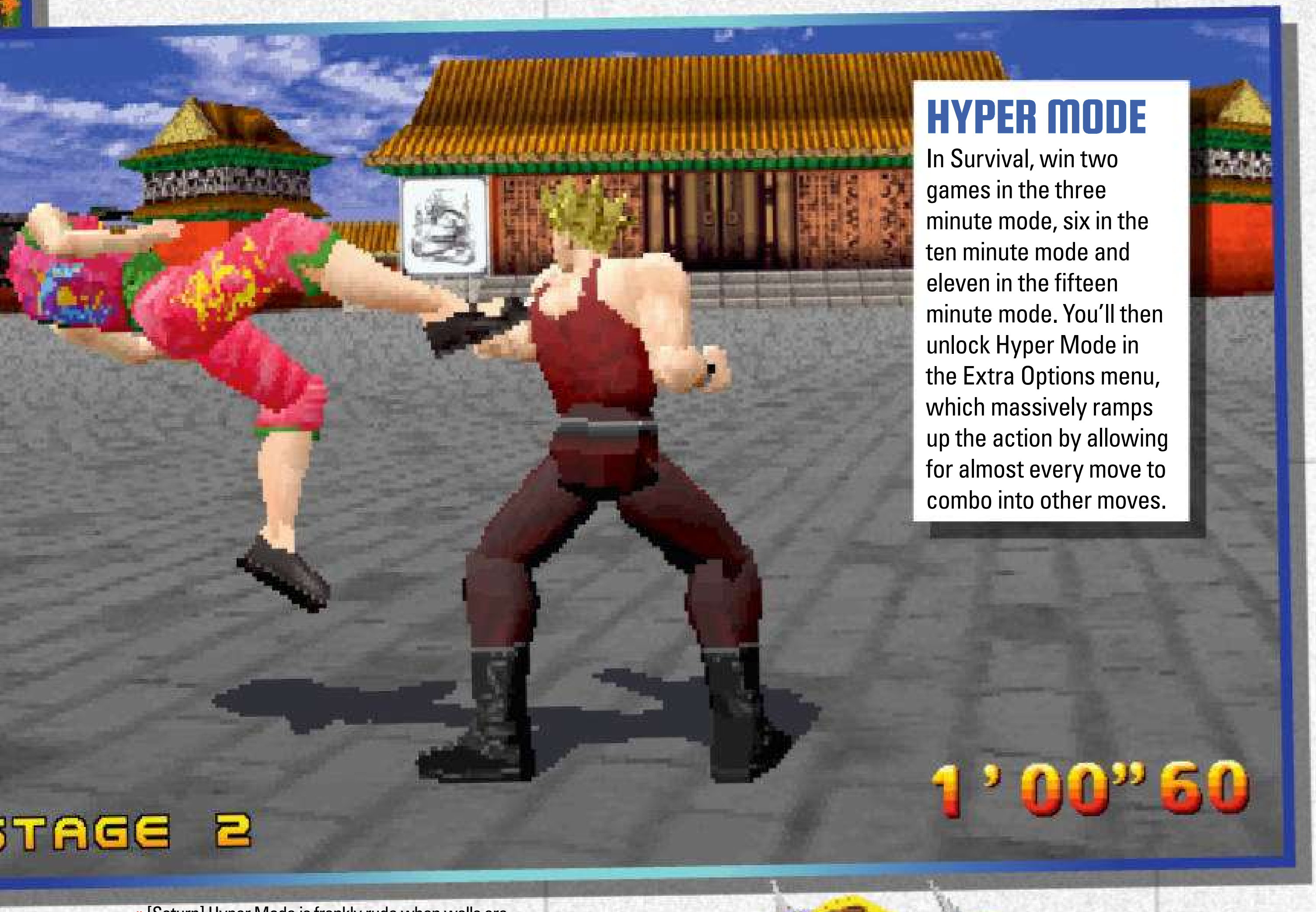
» [Saturn] This flash signifies Shun is about to use a power counter, only possible in Vipers mode.



» [Saturn] Few characters embody the styles clash between the two games better than graceful Lion and the brawler Sanman.



» [Saturn] Akira's stage is one of many *Virtua Fighter* stages to be transformed into an infinite scrolling arena.



» [Saturn] Hyper Mode is frankly rude when walls are involved, and only mildly less ridiculous in open arenas.

HYPER MODE

In Survival, win two games in the three minute mode, six in the ten minute mode and eleven in the fifteen minute mode. You'll then unlock Hyper Mode in the Extra Options menu, which massively ramps up the action by allowing for almost every move to combo into other moves.

PICKY

This irritating little guy is prone to whacking people on the bonce with his skateboard – but he's only 14, so he likely needs the help.

MAHLER

Not much is known about this tough 20-year-old fighter, who served as an unlockable character in *Fighting Vipers* for the Saturn. Cool name.

BM

The big bad boss of *Fighting Vipers* is a powered-up version of Mahler, complete with some fancy, elaborate snake-hood armour.

KUMACHAN

This inflatable bear from a *Fighting Vipers* stage background can't move its limbs, but can still fight, looking utterly odd in the process.

The *Vipers* elements are incorporated mostly intact, with the walled arenas coming across as expected, and Fighting Vipers mode offers mechanics like air recovery, powerful launcher attacks and the power counter moves. *Virtua Fighter* elements have been changed quite a bit compared to *Virtua Fighter 2*, though. Most of the game's arenas are reworked into infinitely scrolling stages, scrapping the ring out mechanic completely, and characters have quite a few of their *Virtua Fighter 3* moves. The Escape button from *Virtua Fighter 3* is also incorporated across both game modes, and body armour is always included if a character is wearing it.

While it wouldn't be proper to say the game is fully based on *Virtua Fighter 3*, as the game lacks features such as uneven fighting stages, these new possibilities make *Fighters Megamix* just as compelling on their own. Saturn owners had never had the chance to execute wall combos with the *Virtua Fighter* cast, nor the ability to let the Vipers out of their cages, and the number of potential match-ups is far higher than before. However, AM2 refused to rely on the novelty of the crossover alone and went far further with extra features, starting with the unique themed courses for solo players. Four are initially available, each consisting of six fighters from the regular cast and a mystery boss. The initial ones are pretty simple like *Virtua Fighter* and *Fighting Vipers* courses, but unlocking the next set gives you more interesting themes such as Muscle and Dirty Fighters.

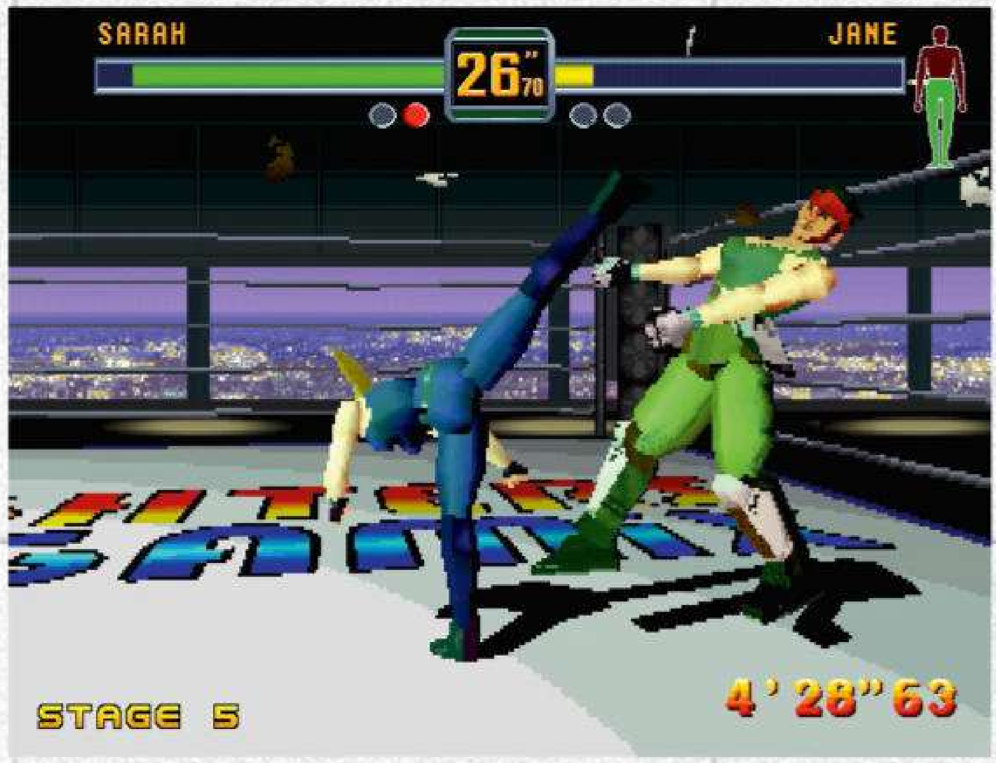
Beating those courses reveals the big thing that sets *Fighters Megamix* apart from AM2's previous Saturn efforts – the unlockable content. The game features ten additional unlockable characters drawn from AM2's previous works, including *Virtua Cop*, *Virtua Fighter Kids*, *Sonic The Fighters*, *Rent-A-Hero* and even *Daytona USA*. These fighters range from inspired to truly daft, and with 32 characters available in total, the roster compares well to any 3D fighting game of the era. The story doesn't even stop there – there are additional skins that don't count as characters in their own right, such as a piece of meat, a schoolgirl version of Honey and a flat-shaded version of the scrapped *Virtua Fighter* character Siba. Each character also has a unique stage with its own musical theme, ensuring plenty of variety across the game. All of these characters and stages could also be used in the game's other modes, Survival and Team Battle, and the Training mode both demonstrated moves and confirmed their correct execution.

Fighters Megamix doesn't use the Saturn's high-resolution mode, with AM2 instead opting for the graphical approach previously adopted in *Fighting Vipers*. Light sourcing and gouraud shading improve the look of the character models during battle and it's possible to incorporate the extra polygons needed for walled stages, while maintaining the all-important 60 frames per second refresh rate. Fans still debate between this approach and the high resolution look of *Virtua Fighter 2* and *Dead Or Alive*, but it's undeniably amongst the best looking Saturn games, fighting or otherwise. The music is also fantastic, drawing on themes from across the various games featured, though there is a slight compromise – each stage's theme has been shortened in order to fit them all on a standard CD, so the music restarts after each round.

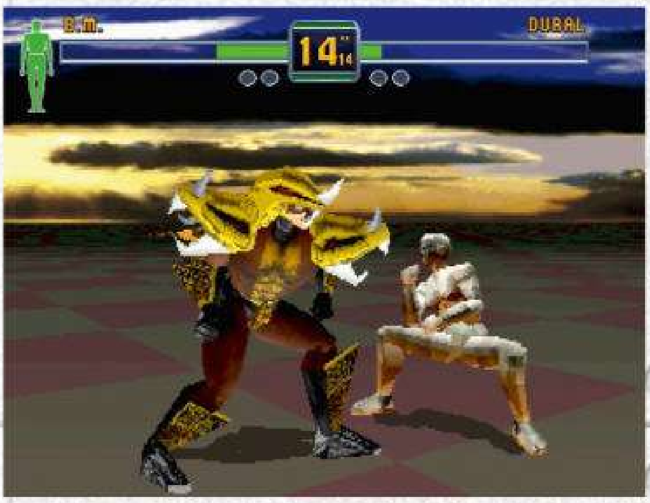
What makes all of this so amazing is how quickly AM2 put it all together. When *Fighters Megamix* launched in Japan on 21 December 1996, it had been less than four months since the Saturn version of *Fighting Vipers* had launched. North American and European releases followed in May and June of 1997 respectively. Despite following hot on the heels of *Fighting Vipers*, the game was a big success for Sega too – the game sold some 260,000 copies in its first week in Japan, and by November of 1997 had shifted through 600,000 units in the country. That was enough to make it the best-selling original game on the console at the time, beating high-profile games such as *NiGHTS Into Dreams* and *Sakura Taisen*.

In addition to sales success, *Fighters Megamix* received widespread critical acclaim. *Sega Power*'s review awarded the game 95%, calling it "the most comprehensive, detailed and utterly playable beat-'em-up you're likely to see until *Virtua Fighter 3* appears". *GamesMaster* also scored it 95%, advising players "Get it instead of *Virtua Fighter 2*. Got *Virtua Fighter 2*? Well, get it in anyway". *Sega Saturn Magazine* scored the game 95% too, declaring that "The combination of myriad gaming styles by including the Vipers and the VFers in one game really is a unique proposition that simply MUST be experienced". *Computer & Video Games* gave *Fighters Megamix* 5/5, telling readers "If you like fighting games in any way you'll realise that this is the best available by a long way".

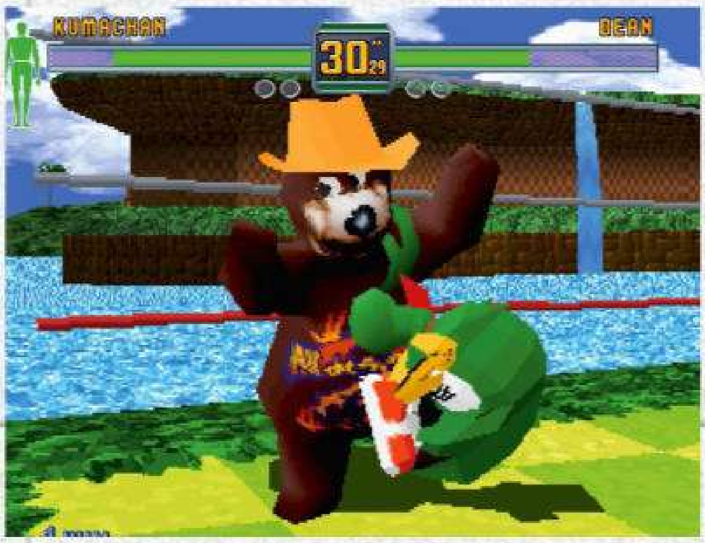
Despite being one of the greatest 3D fighters of its generation, *Fighters Megamix* was destined to become a fleeting moment in gaming history. AM2 never revisited the crossover concept, and indeed abandoned *Fighting Vipers* after the second game, and *Fighters Megamix* has never received a re-release on modern platforms. Still, that just gives the Saturn something special all to itself, so if you've never experienced the brilliance of pitting a stock car against a giant inflatable bear, our advice is to track down a copy of the game and find out for yourself why fans hold it in such high regard. ✱

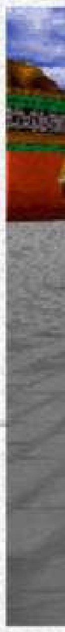


» [Saturn] Sarah smashes Jane's top half armour off with a powerful thrust kick.



» [Saturn] In a clash of the bosses, Dural deftly sidesteps BM's punching combo.





GUESTS OF HONOUR

WHO ARE THE TEN UNLOCKABLE FIGHTERS, AND WHERE DO THEY COME FROM?

KIDS AKIRA

This big-headed version of Akira Yuki hails from *Virtua Fighter Kids*, a special version of *Virtua Fighter 2* featuring super-deformed (or 'chibi' in more modern vernacular) versions of the cast. His stage is the kids version of Akira's stage, and like the regular version it doesn't feature walls.

KIDS SARAH

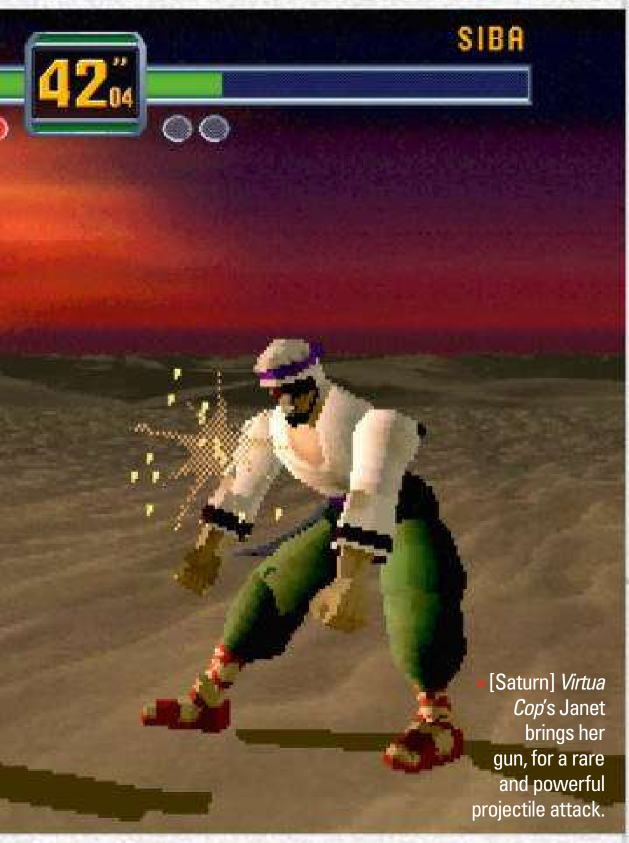
Just like Kids Akira, Kids Sarah hails from *Virtua Fighter Kids*. But rather than using the kids version of her *Virtua Fighter 2* stage, Kids Sarah features a special version of Sarah's stage from the original *Virtua Fighter*. Unlike the original stage, this version includes large walls formed out of neon signs.

RENTAHERO

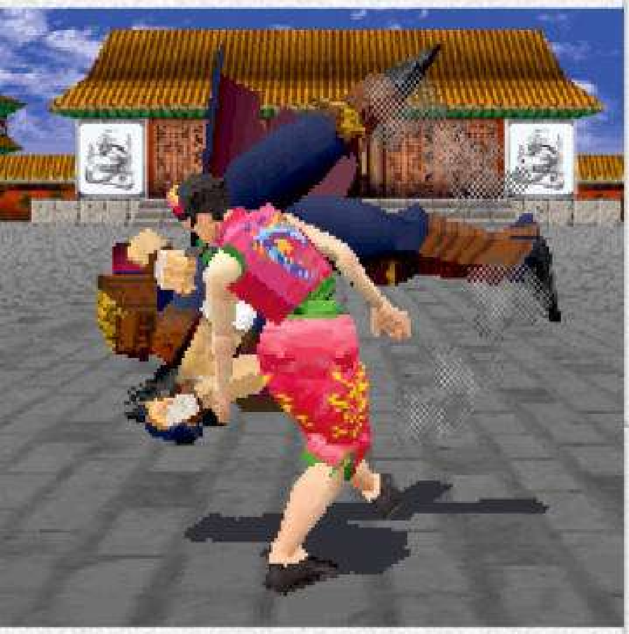
Originally appearing in the Japanese Mega Drive RPG *Rent A Hero*, this everyday superhero has a unique mechanic in that his armour is powered by batteries, and it will break if they run out. He's got a fantastic vocal theme in the Japanese version, and uses a walled version of *Virtua Fighter 2*'s Chicago stage.

JANET MARSHALL

Joining the cast from *Virtua Cop 2*, Janet actually mostly uses Aoi's moves from *Virtua Fighter 3* – but she can also just pull out a gun and shoot her opponent, which, to be honest, seems a little unfair to the other combatants. Anyway, her home stage is a version of the docks from her own game.



» [Saturn] *Virtua Cop's* Janet brings her gun, for a rare and powerful projectile attack.



» [Saturn] Pai grabs Bahn's arm mid-punch and turns his momentum against him with a great reversal.

Q&A: SEGA LORD X

THE POPULAR SEGA YOUTUBER EXPLAINS WHY HE LOVES THIS CROSSOVER CLASSIC

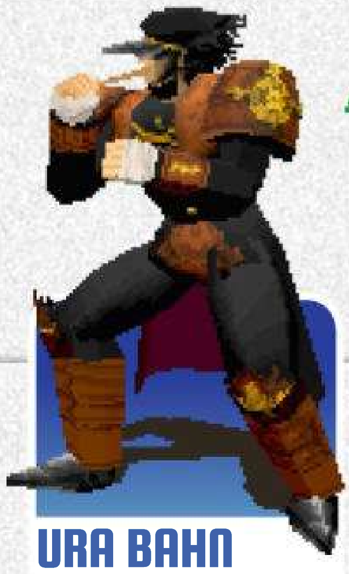
Before *Fighters Megamix* launched, how much interest did you have in seeing the *Virtua Fighter* and *Fighting Vipers* characters face each other? Did the final game change your opinion?
I had never truly considered a crossover before *Fighters Megamix*. That's kinda what made it so special. It came out of left field and was totally something I had no clue I needed in my life. Sega kept the core disciplines intact of both games, so you could play it exactly how you wanted. It was a brilliant product.

Which fighting style do you prefer, and why?
I always considered *Virtua Fighter* a remarkably realistic fighter. I know, the floaty jumps and a few of the flashier moves are sort of silly, but most of the combat is well grounded in the various martial arts they're based on. *Fighting Vipers* sort of takes that same idea and just adds more to it. The caged arenas you can use as part of the combat, the armour, the knockout moves, it took *Virtua Fighter* and I dare say made it more interesting. I enjoy them both, but *Fighting Vipers* is definitely more exciting.

There were quite a few changes made to the *Virtua Fighter* side of things – the sidestep button and new moves came in from *Virtua Fighter 3*, and ring outs were eliminated. How did you feel about those changes at the time?
For the most part the changes were for the better. *Virtua Fighter* needed a little spicing up to mix well with *Fighting Vipers*. It also didn't leave us with the same gameplay we had seen in *VF2*. *VF3* was out at that point and it gave Saturn owners a little taste of it.

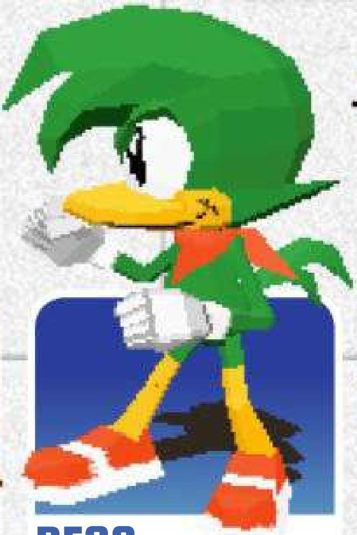
***Fighters Megamix* has plenty of secrets and unlockables. Which is your favourite and why?**
I think I enjoyed the overall structure of it the most. Defeating each route, opening up a new character. That basically motivated you to really explore the content and the gameplay types. You were rewarded each and every time you played it. Seeing the new fighters and arenas was a big part of the *Fighters Megamix* experience. My favourite hidden character was Hornet from *Daytona*. It was silly, but you just had to love the fan service.

What do you feel is the biggest thing that sets *Fighters Megamix* apart from the Saturn's other 3D fighting games?
Fighters Megamix was an epic experience I feel because it threw off the shackles of being an arcade port. Sega didn't set out to copy anything with it. They freely explored different ideas and let their imaginations run wild. It's something Sega should have done more often. As much as I loved their content, they really short-changed their home versions by restricting them. *Fighters Megamix* broke that chain and gave us more than we had ever gotten in a mere arcade port.



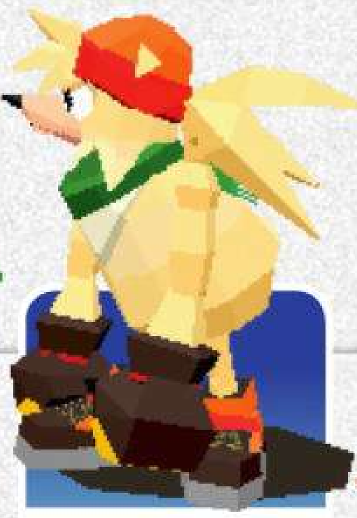
URA BAHN

As you've probably guessed, Ura Bahn is a powered-up version of the *Fighting Vipers* character, with some extra moves. His stage is set outside Old Armstone City, with scenery from his normal stage visible in the background, and unlike most *Fighting Vipers* stages it has no walls.



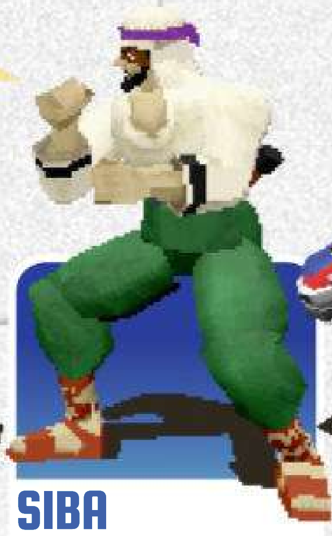
BEAN

The dynamite duck makes his way to *Fighters Megamix* from *Sonic The Fighters*, though fans of *Dynamite Dux* may well recognise him too. He has a nasty habit of throwing bombs around, and has adopted Knuckles' South Island stage as his own for this game, abandoning his own bomb factory.



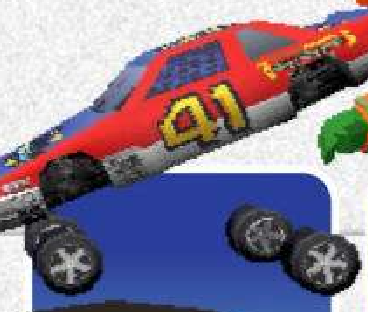
BARK

This brawny polar bear also comes from *Sonic The Fighters*, and possesses some powerful attacks like spinning punches. He's able to dress up as Santa in a fun bit. He keeps his own ice-field stage from his original game, but the walls have been removed for *Fighters Megamix*.



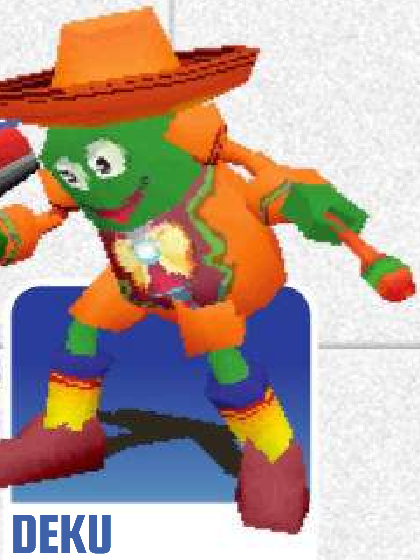
SIBA

Once intended for inclusion in *Virtua Fighter*, this Arabian swordsman failed to make the cut in the final game, being replaced by Akira. He's been given a proper move set here including sword attacks, and has adopted a flattened version of Wolf's *Virtua Fighter 3* stage for his debut.



HORNET

Yes, it's the car from *Daytona USA*! It seems fairly useless at first glance, with few moves of its own – however, with its armour removed it gains Bahn's moves and a surprising degree of agility. Its walled stage is a representation of *Daytona USA*'s beginner track, Three-Seven Speedway.



DEKU

The game's only original character is a bizarre Mexican green bean equipped with maracas and a hat that functions as armour. Knock it off and you'll reveal a little yellow chick. This very strange character inhabits the training mode stage, an original walled arena made for this game.

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come

retro GAMER
428
Shibuya Scramble
IN THIS ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER
SINCLAIR ZX80
WARIO
JOHN GIBSON
MYSTICAL NINJA

Info

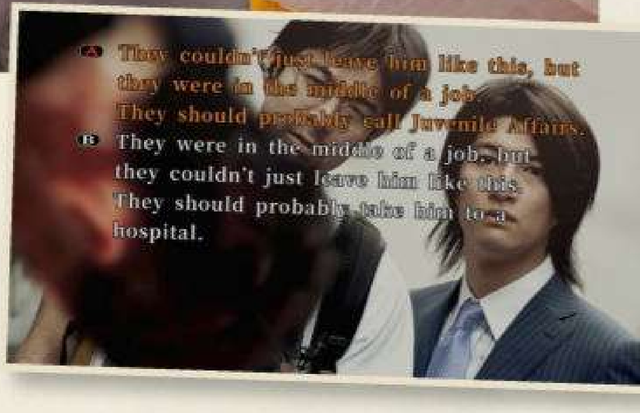
- » **System:** PC/PS4
- » **Year:** 2018
- » **Publisher:** Koch Media/ Spike Chunsoft
- » **Developer:** Spike Chunsoft
- » **Key People:** Koichi Nakamura (producer), Takeshi Furuta (director), Ayumu Iino (director), Yukinori Kitajima (writer)

Go Deeper

» Despite being highly reviewed and having a strong fan following, Koichi Nakamura has stated that *428: Shibuya Scramble* barely made back its development costs.

» Shooting footage in Shibuya is illegal unless you possess a difficult to acquire permit, so Chunsoft took some risks and broke the law to make *428: Shibuya Scramble*.

» [PS4] The principal players of the game (L-R): Minoru Minorikawa, Shinya Kano, Achi Endo, Kenji Osawa and Tama.



A They couldn't just leave him like this, but they were in the middle of a job. They should probably call Juvenile Affairs.

B They were in the middle of a job, but they couldn't just leave him like this. They should probably take him to a hospital.

For a whole decade, Spike Chunsoft's classic visual novel was only available to Japanese speakers. Now it's in English, find out why you shouldn't sleep on its striking real-world presentation and complex web of intersecting stories

Words by Nick Thorpe

428: SHIBUYA SCRAMBLE

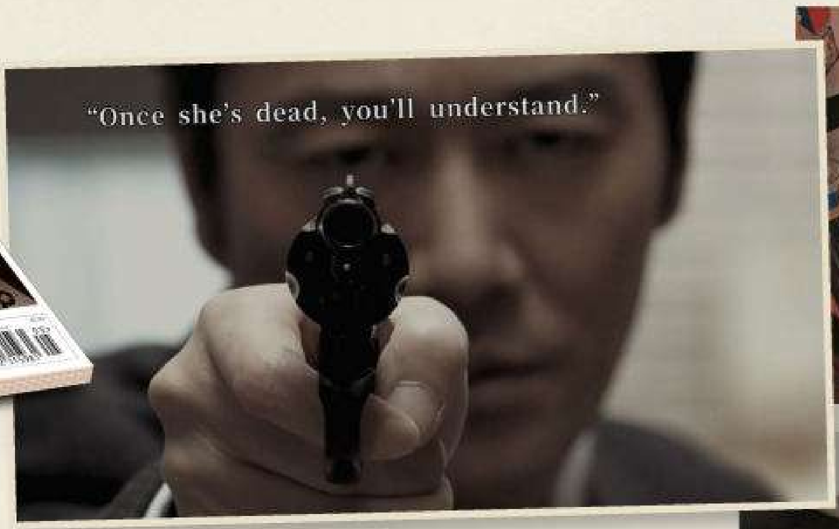
THE BACKGROUND

In 1998, Chunsoft released *Machi* – a 'sound novel' that followed many people who pass one another in Shibuya, Tokyo. Playing from various perspectives including those of a gangster, a politician, an actor and a conman, the various stories came together in one tale. Released for the Saturn, PlayStation and PSP, the game became one of Japan's most beloved adventure games. A decade later, Chunsoft would create a spiritual successor to *Machi* in the form of *428: Shibuya Scramble*, a thriller that returned to Shibuya and adopted a similar gameplay style, featuring multiple character perspectives and a variety of different endings. This time though, a new cast of characters would become entangled in an unfolding crime in Tokyo's busiest district.

Initially released for the Wii by Sega in 2008, *428: Shibuya Scramble* scored a perfect 40/40 in *Famitsu*. The game was ported to PS3 and PSP in 2009, and later to iOS and Android in 2011, but all of these releases were confined to Japan only. The English translation of the game was a pet project of the game's localisation producer David Kracker, and was ported by Dutch studio Abstraction Games. Kajiya Productions handled the English script for the game. Versions for the PC and PS4 were released in September 2018, this time in both English and Japanese.

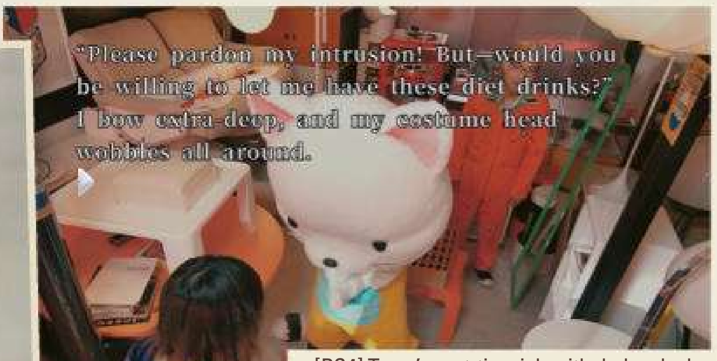
THE GAME

428: Shibuya Scramble allows you to follow multiple characters over the course of a single day in Shibuya. Initially, you follow police detective Shinya Kano as he watches the scene of an arranged ransom handover in a kidnapping case. The game soon expands to include the perspectives of former gang leader Achi Endo, freelance journalist Minoru Minorikawa, research scientist Kenji Osawa and Tama, a temp worker trapped in a cat costume. Each character's story is written with a different stylistic emphasis – Kano's police drama contrasts heavily with Tama's comedic misadventures and Osawa's horror story – and their paths all cross in



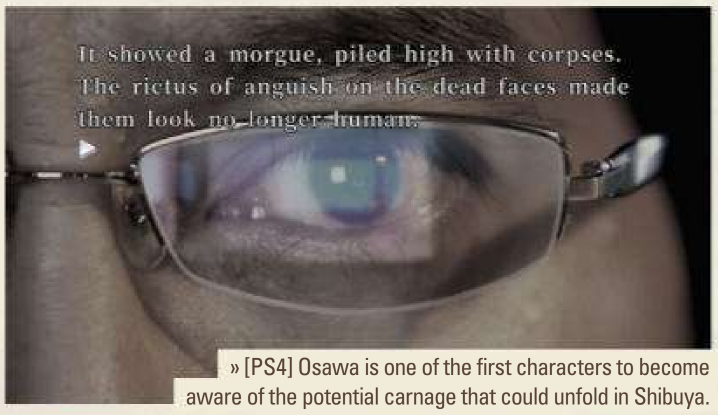
"Once she's dead, you'll understand."

» [PS4] Achi Endo is protecting Hitomi from this mysterious gunman – what does he want with her?



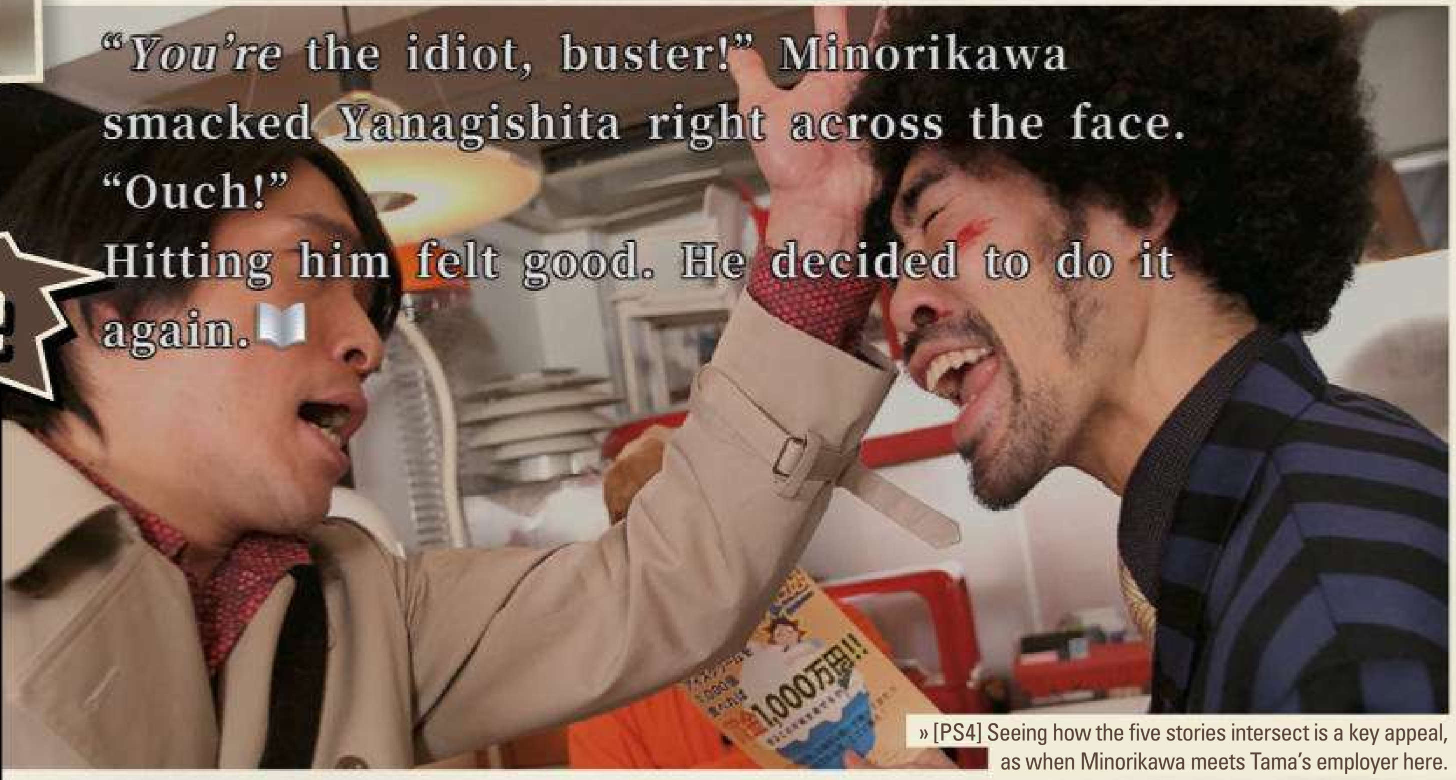
"Please pardon my intrusion! But—would you be willing to let me have these diet drinks?" I bow extra-deep, and my costume head wobbles all around.

» [PS4] Tama's part-time job with dodgy dealer Yanagashita makes for plenty of comic relief.



It showed a morgue, piled high with corpses. The rictus of anguish on the dead faces made them look no longer human.

» [PS4] Osawa is one of the first characters to become aware of the potential carnage that could unfold in Shibuya.

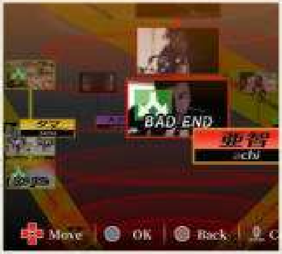


"You're the idiot, buster!" Minorikawa smacked Yanagishita right across the face.
"Ouch!"
Hitting him felt good. He decided to do it again.

» [PS4] Seeing how the five stories intersect is a key appeal, as when Minorikawa meets Tama's employer here.

Things of note

TIME LORD



Getting all of your decisions in order is easy, thanks to a handy time chart that shows you major decision points, as well as jump points and unresolved bad endings.

TIPS AND TREATS

Bondage

Here, "bondage" is used strictly in the se

Any other types of "Yakuza bondage" will
in this game.
Sorry if the Tip link here got your hopes

Always check the tip links because they're often pretty informative, but they're also very funny asides. There's even a whole sub-plot concerning the Wandering Angels theatre troupe.

CELEBRITY CAMEO

man looks a lot like the musici
er.

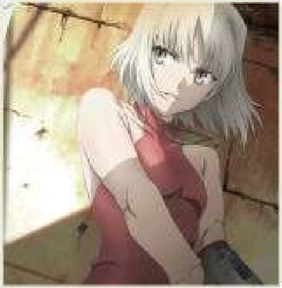
Japanese musician Aya Kamiki provided the game's theme song, and is frequently referenced in Osawa's story. She even makes a cameo appearance later on in the game.

POST-GAME PARTS

, crap! That shirt, man." The g
s starting to break.
Mean Clean?

Once you've finished the main game, there are plenty of additional stories to read as post-game content – which is great, as you'll definitely be hungry for more.

ANIME ACTION



The anime series *Canaan* is a follow-up to the events of *428: Shibuya Scramble*, but make sure that you finish the game before viewing – it contains major spoilers.

unexpected ways as they experience an event that could change the course of world history.

The game is unlike most visual novels released in English, as the game is presented as text over photographs of live actors, with music and ambient noises to help set the scene. As you read, some terms will be highlighted in blue and allow you to read additional information on locations, characters and more, while words highlighted in red allow you to jump to an appropriate point in another character's story. The interactivity comes in the form of a puzzle, which is best described as like trying to play five interconnected *Choose Your Own Adventure* novels at once. When you pick a character from the menu, you'll follow their story and encounter occasional points at which you need to make decisions, before eventually being stopped for one of three reasons. The best outcome is that you've made it to the end of their chapter. Sometimes, you'll reach a 'stop' sign, which requires you to jump in from a link in another character's story.

However, the most common reason is that you'll reach a bad ending, of which the game has dozens. These are the consequences of a wrong decision having been made somewhere, and range from tragedy to comedy – your character is as likely to be murdered in cold blood as they are to simply pack up and begin a new life as a fisherman. What complicates matters is that a bad ending can be caused by events from outside of your character's story – frequently, a seemingly inconsequential decision made by one character can have dramatic unforeseen consequences for another. For example, early on Tama must choose one of two potential customers to target with a sample of the diet drink Burning Hammer. One of them is Kano's partner Sasayama, who will hand it to him later – causing Kano to experience a severe physical malfunction and a bad ending. The goal is to ensure that every character's actions work together, which sounds complex but is made easier by the fact that consequences always stay within the same chapter.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

Really, we're just playing catch-up because of the belated English translation – in Japan, *428: Shibuya Scramble* is already acknowledged as a classic. Back in 2017, *Famitsu* readers voted it the second best adventure game of all time, behind only *Steins;Gate*, and ahead of *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney*, *Danganronpa* and its own predecessor *Machi*.

428: Shibuya Scramble deserves its place amongst those icons of the genre. While the puzzle element of the game is satisfying in its own right, and the real-world setting makes it easy to relate to, what makes the game so enjoyable is the writing. The game is a real rollercoaster ride, with comedic and sentimental moments playing out against the backdrop of a high stakes criminal investigation with real stakes that only increase as the day plays out. Character traits like Achi's sub-genius utterances or Minorikawa's hilarious bluster make the main cast easy to warm to, but the supporting cast are unforgettable too, from the banana-toting detective Kajiwara to the impossibly smooth taxi driver Kimizuka. If you've ever loved a visual novel, *428: Shibuya Scramble* will be up there with your favourites – and if you haven't, this is a perfect way to get acquainted with the genre. *

THE HISTORY OF TIMESPLITTERS

“WE HAD TO GO THROUGH AN APPROVAL PROCESS WITH SONY TO GET A DEV KIT, AND THOSE WERE LIKE ROCKING-HORSE SHIT – THEY WEREN’T HANDING THEM OUT AT ALL”

DAVID DOAK

» David Doak cofounded Free Radical Design and was involved with all three games.

Humour, fast-action gunplay and plenty of unlikely time-travelling antics. We look back (or forward?) at the cult FPS from the team that once reinvented the genre on console

Words by Adam Barnes

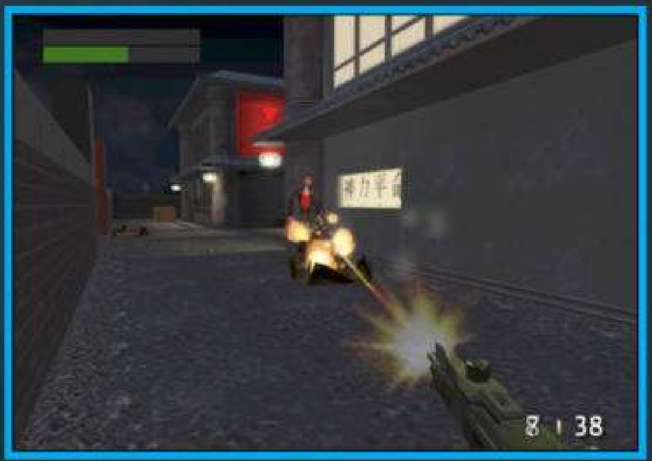
When you're responsible for a game like *GoldenEye*, a game that lives on in the minds of gamers around the globe as one of the most important releases of any generation, you have to expect a certain degree of dread when it comes to stepping out of the shadow of Rare and the Stamper brothers. That's not to say that *TimeSplitters* isn't deserving of the cult reputation that surrounds it, but when you can say that your game single-handedly shifted the way shooters were played… well, it's a high tightrope with a very long fall back down to earth.

"At the beginning there was really only five of us," says David Doak, one of the initial founders of the developer behind *TimeSplitters* as well as the game's designer and programmer. "We had left Rare to set up Free Radical, and the project that we pitched to publishers when we were trying to get funding was actually the game that became *Second Sight*. The working title was called *Redemption*, and it was going to be a first-person narrative-driven shooter with psychic abilities." In the end an agreement was made with Eidos for this small team to work for roughly three years on a novel FPS, and initial progress was fast. From leaving Rare in 1998, signing the contract with Eidos in February 1999 and moving into offices by April, Free Radical was up and running quickly.

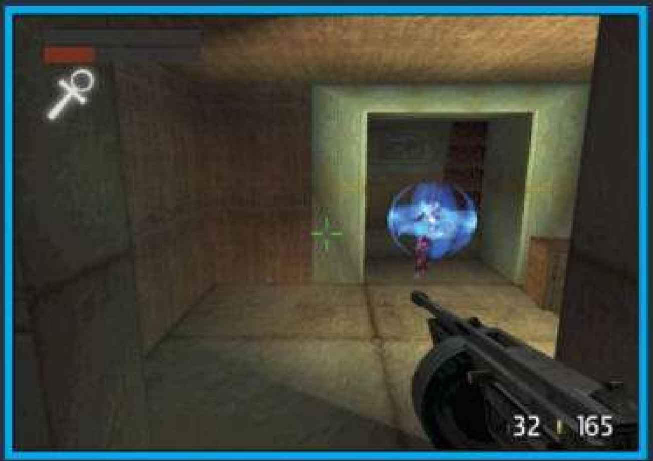
"We had to go through an approval process with Sony to get a dev kit," adds David, "and those were like rocking-horse shit – they weren't handing them out at all." Yet somehow Free Radical managed to get hold of one, and in very little time a prototype of the game was created for Sony's soon-to-be powerhouse console. "Steve [Ellis, lead programmer] got something up and running really quickly. I think Sony were really impressed; their experience had been that people would take six months, eight months, a year to get anything working at all on PS2. It was down to Steve's technical ability: he had a first-person thing up and running fairly quickly." The plan had always been to release the game on Sony's second PlayStation and take some time developing a standout title for the console. But it soon became apparent that the launch date of the PS2 was going to shift by quite some margin, giving David and the rest of the team some food for thought about how to proceed with the new machine. "Some internal discussion we had with ourselves was just like 'Well, it looks like the PS2 launch date is going to slip, maybe we should be trying to make just a fast, action, first-person shooter for launch rather than spending three years to make the game – as was the initial plan for *Redemption*.'"

The team started to change its direction, even before speaking to its publisher about the major shift in gears that the project was about to go under, excited by the potential success that could come from having a PS2 launch title. "It was all very novel to us," David explains, "we had never been in charge of our own destiny before because we had just been working at Rare. But we told Eidos what we wanted to do, and they said 'Absolutely not, don't change what you're doing, we don't want that kind of messing around going on.'" Not liking the response, David and Steve – the two team members primarily handling this side of Free Radical's business – reached out to Sony, detailing what it was that they wanted to do and explaining that Eidos was not allowing it. "And that's how we got a change; we were a bit brash," laughs David.

The new approach for the game was a much simpler concept, with the idea for psychic powers and a rich narrative being ditched in favour of something fun, quick and easy to make in time for the PS2's new launch date. "The change of direction that we proposed was



» [PS2] By modern day standards, the combat of the original *TimeSplitters* is pretty barebones. But it was a challenge, and definitely required some skill.



» [PS2] Each level of the original played the same: search the map for the specific object, then return back to the exit while facing spawning TimeSplitters.

KEY CHARACTERS

THE MOST ICONIC, THE MOST DEADLY AND THE MOST UNUSUAL PICKS FOR TIMESPLITTERS MULTIPLAYER

R 108

STRENGTH

It's a sentient robot

WEAKNESS

It's kinda on the large side

■ The R-Series of robots have been a part of the *TimeSplitters* games since the original, starting with R-108 and then succeeded by R-109 and R-110. They might not be the best picks for multiplayer, but they're a popular choice all the same – likely due to their impact on the stories of each game.

HANDYMAN

STRENGTH

A truly rewarding unlocking

WEAKNESS

Pretty average stats, all told

■ Considering the stats, this is hardly a character you'd ordinarily want to pick for multiplayer. However, the sheer difficulty to unlock it makes it more of a pride thing than anything else, ignoring the fact that you're probably good enough at the game at this point to survive a minor 'handy-cap'.

CRISPIN

STRENGTH

Can't be set on fire if you're already on fire

WEAKNESS

Hiding isn't really an option…

■ For the sheer audacity of being a blazing, gun-toting zombie, there aren't many multiplayer choices that say 'I'm so good, I will give my location away'. Crispin is the sort of character that that one mate of yours who is just a little bit too loud would pick, before never being invited in the house again.

MONKEY

STRENGTH

Super quick, kinda small

WEAKNESS

Addicted to bananas

■ The Monkey character went on to become sort of the mascot for *TimeSplitters*' silly, irreverent approach to FPS gameplay, but in *TimeSplitters 2* it was an especially good choice for multiplayer due to its high agility stat and diminutive stature. It was even used as part of the early teases for *TimeSplitters 4*.

CHINESE CHEF

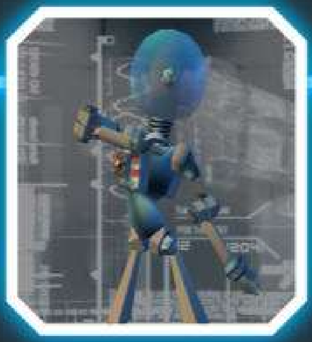
STRENGTH

Free Dim Sum?

WEAKNESS

Pretty much everything if we're honest

■ He's not an especially versatile battler, but the Chinese Chef is one of the few non-primary characters to have featured in all three *TimeSplitters* games, which makes him a popular choice for long-term fans. Seems 'Chinese Waiter' wasn't deemed important enough to carry through the series…



ROBOFISH

STRENGTH

It's small size makes it a hard-to-hit target

WEAKNESS

Average stats, but does that really matter?!

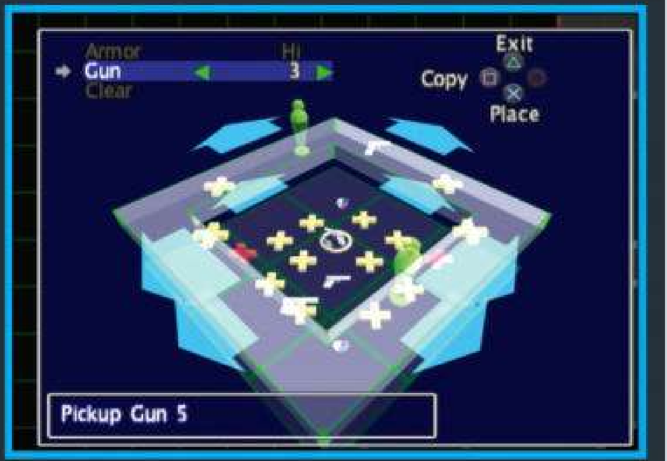
■ For the same reason that Oddjob was considered OP in *GoldenEye* due to his smaller size, Robofish is *TimeSplitters*' equivalent and has therefore been the pick of the cheap and unskilled throughout the whole series. Judge all who rush to select this robotic fishbowl.

» [PS2] There's rarely any specifics when it comes to the series' future settings, likely to avoid digging the story into a hole it can't retcon out of.

» [PS2] A focus on crime, sci-fi and horror movie genres was at the root of *TimeSplitters*' various stages and gameplay designed around it.

▶ just to make what we called *MPG* – 'multiplayer game'. We were gonna make a single-player story game [with *Redemption*], and ended up deciding to make something that was just like the multiplayer from *GoldenEye*." In fact the heritage of the team and its work on *GoldenEye* was at the core of *TimeSplitters*, primarily because of the frustrations that David and the other Free Radicals had endured when working on the *Bond* title. "But what would be different about *MPG* would be that it will be on PlayStation 2, it'll be fast, we'll do as much as we can with the hardware in the time and it'll have lots of variety. There was nothing more than that." This is why there are so many different weapons to use, enemies to slay and environments to play around in. "The variety was that we decided to do lots of different movie genres," explains David, "so the three main threads were crime, sci-fi and horror and we'll do different time periods because that allows us to move things about a bit."

> "WHEN WE FINISHED TS1, WE KNEW EXACTLY WHAT WE WANTED TO DO FOR TS2 SO WE LAUNCHED INTO IT"
>
> DAVID DOAK



» [PS2] The map maker feature was a unique way to add some longevity to the multiplayer, and it was surprisingly robust.

It's at this point you're probably starting to connect the dots, but originally "there were no *TimeSplitters*", the time-travelling enemies of the game having been bolted on in a way to add some context to the gun-shootery. "They came out of one of the horror models," recalls David. "One of the original models was called a splitter zombie or something. It's got like a corpse draped around some bone structure of an alien. That was the start of it, and the name came along afterwards."

David admits that it was a "conservative" game in the end, pointing to the limited story, rudimentary AI and basic mission structure, but the team stuck to what it wanted to make: a slick, quick FPS that wasn't so restricted in realism and existing characters and story like *GoldenEye* had been. "The map maker was one of the most innovative things about *TimeSplitters*," adds David, "and it was a real fight to get Eidos particularly to realise the value of that. But that was the thing, we were always trying to make something that would please ourselves. And that was the thing about *GoldenEye*, it was great but it didn't have very many multiplayer maps. So why not let the players make them themselves?"

And better yet, Free Radical managed to hit its deadline and release *TimeSplitters* alongside the launch of the PS2 in October 2000 in North America and a month later in Europe. Facing off against the likes of *Tekken*, *Street Fighter*, *Ridge Racer*, *Unreal Tournament* and *SSX* will not have been an easy feat for an unknown title flung together in 18 months, but *TimeSplitters* fared well among its competition – and however ropey

VIOLA

STRENGTH

One of the fastest characters you can play

WEAKNESS

She's very cheery…

Though this travelling troubadour is as quick as Monkey (which is a huge advantage in multiplayer), she's not got all that much else going for her. Despite that, she has remained a fan favourite and was often a popular choice – likely due to her quirky get-up and cheery attitude.

STONE GOLEM

STRENGTH

This brute can take a mountain of damage

WEAKNESS

As quick as a rock

If you want to play the numbers game, there aren't many characters to pick in multiplayer better than Stone Golem. Being made of stone, it's immune to fire and shock damage and has a ton of stamina, so while it might not be the quickest character on the map, it's a survivor that's hard to put down.

JO-BETH CASEY

STRENGTH

Daring enough to take on deadly zombies

WEAKNESS

That mini-skirt isn't suitable

The original Casey, Mary-Beth, was one of the main characters of the original game, but it was her sister Jo-Beth that ended up taking the limelight. She featured in *TS2* as your typical high-school zombie-slayer, and in *TS3* with attire that skewed towards the porno stereotype of a schoolgirl.

SERGEANT CORTEZ

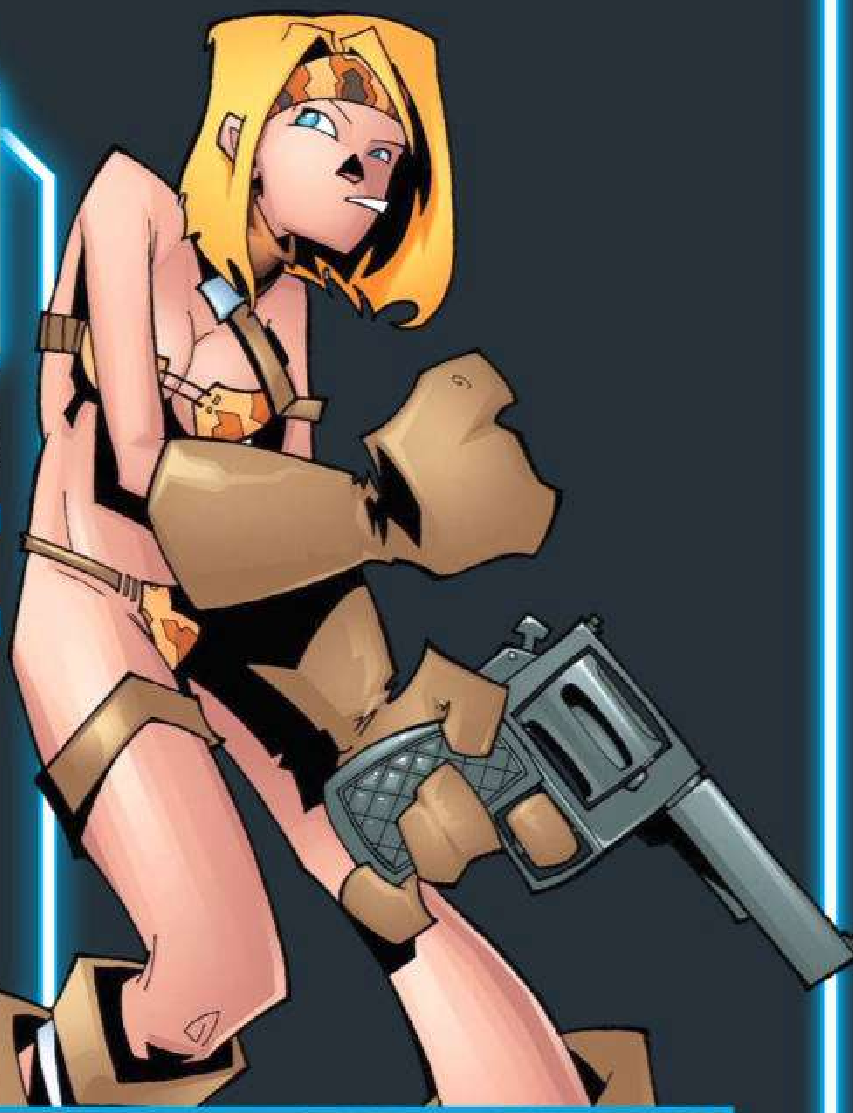
STRENGTH

Can wear numerous alternate costumes

WEAKNESS

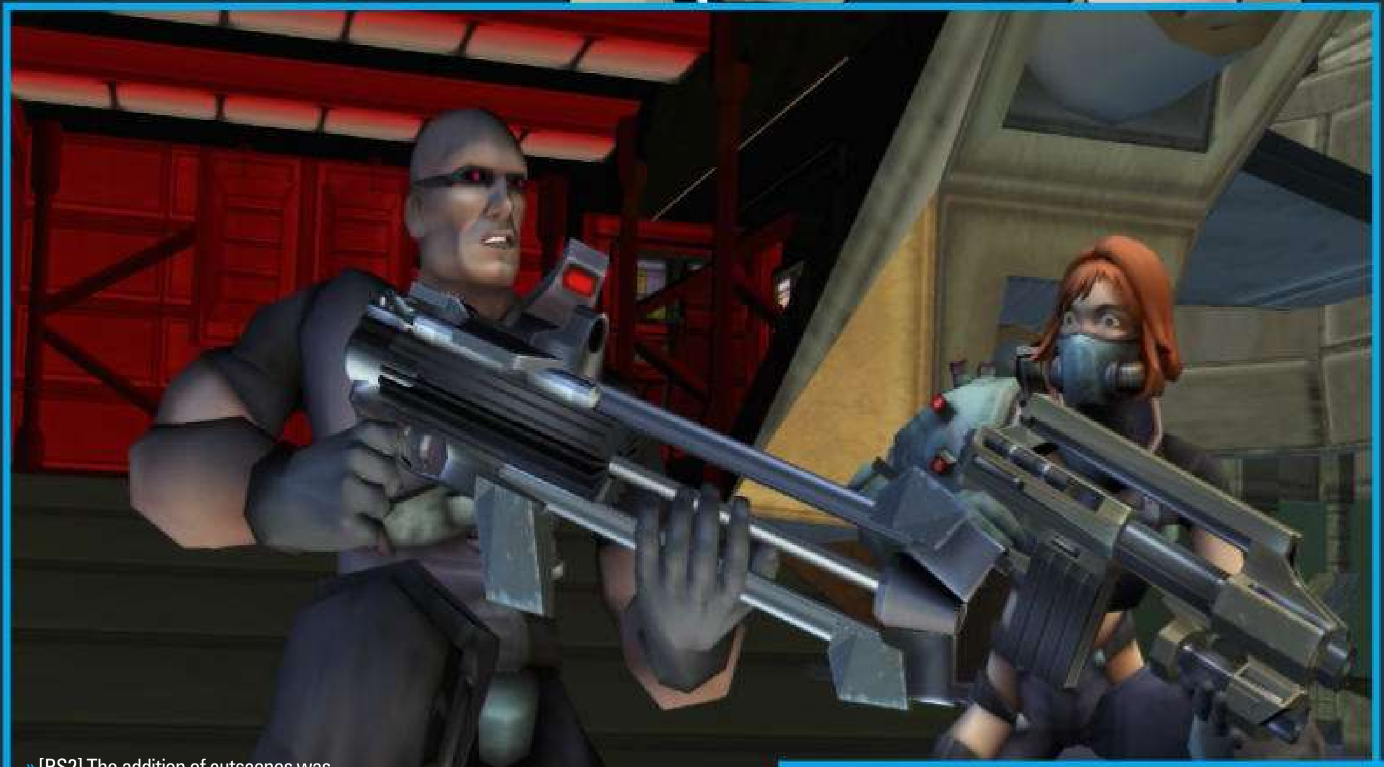
He's a bald space marine?

Cortez has been the face of the games since *TimeSplitters 2*, and is the main character of the story. He's as generic as they can come, especially considering the wacky roster on offer in *TimeSplitters*, but he's still a goofball, fondly remembered for his catchphrase, "It's time to split."

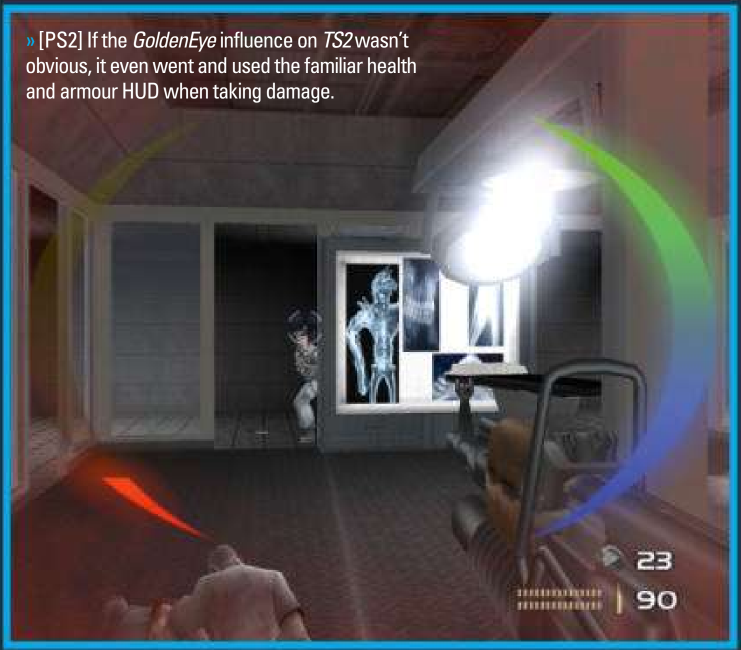


the PS2 launch titles may have been, there were some hard-hitting releases to contend with. It was played by a good number of players, enjoyed for its freshness, its speed and its multiplayer-focused gameplay. Free Radical had made the right call to get something out in time for Sony's PS2 hitting the shelves, and it added some weight to the ex-Rare developers as a talented team with some fun ideas. It was ratifying in some ways, proving that they were more than just a few of the team members that worked on *GoldenEye*. The sales may not have set the world on fire, but it started what would go on to be something of a cult following for the franchise. And the team knew just what they needed to do next…

"When we finished *TS1*, we knew exactly what we wanted to do for *TS2* so we launched into it," says David. "We were able to hire a bunch of people because we had a bit more reputation then, and *TS2* got done in under two years. *TS2* is so much more of a complex game than *TS1*, and I don't think we put a foot wrong making that game. I can't remember much about doing it other than it being constant hard work, but it was really enjoyable work." To turn around a full sequel in such a short space of time is nothing short of outstanding, but the fact that *TimeSplitters 2* has since gone on to be revered within the world of FPS games says a lot about the improvements that were made and the final quality of the released product. "I think peak Free Radical was *TimeSplitters 2*," adds David, "I think that was the best thing we did. *TS2* was an incredibly efficient dev cycle. At the time we probably felt like we were trying to bail out a lifeboat or something, because we were never complacent about where we were. We did *TimeSplitters* and got it done for the PS2 launch, which looking back is an amazing



» [PS2] The addition of cutscenes was important for Free Radical, and it was here the studio was able to refine its tone and art style.



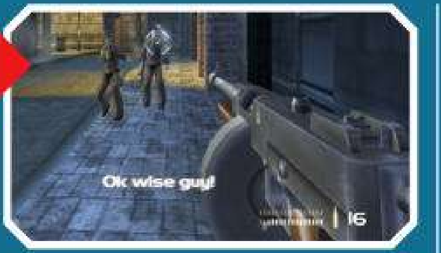
» [PS2] If the *GoldenEye* influence on *TS2* wasn't obvious, it even went and used the familiar health and armour HUD when taking damage.

» [PS2] The step-up from *TS1* to its sequel was considerable, refining everything about the core gameplay of the original to make a much more well-rounded game.

WEAPON OF CHOICE

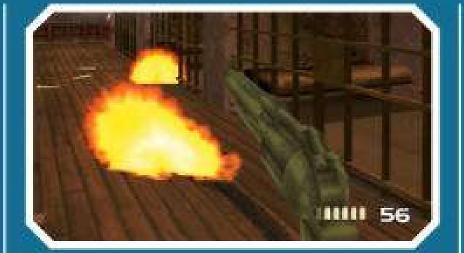
THE RIGHT TOOL FOR THE JOB… FOR THE RIGHT ERA

ERA: 1850S-1930S



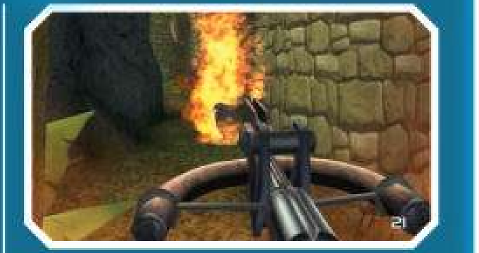
TOMMY GUN

While the options for weaponry is limited in *TimeSplitters*' historic sections, the Tommy gun is obviously a favourite for a number of reasons. It's appeared in every game in the series, but it adds a lot of thematic substance in *TS2* when taking on mobsters in Chicago.



REVOLVER

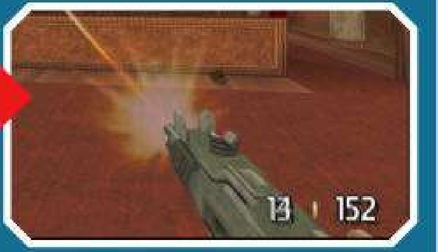
There's one mission throughout the series that takes place in the Wild West, and because of that the obligatory revolver handgun is able to make it into this list. The classic six-shooter is an iconic weapon, made all the more badass in *TimeSplitters* when you're able to wield two at once.



CROSSBOW

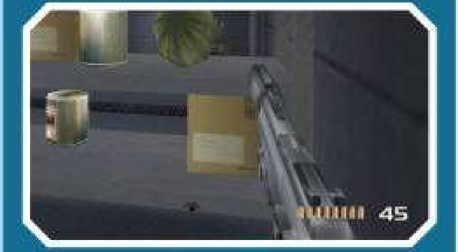
Though this was changed to 'Harpoon Gun' in *TimeSplitters 3*, the reusable ammunition and arcing shots make it especially useful. The arrows can be set alight, too, to burn any would be assailants to death rather than have to worry yourself about quick-shot trajectory.

ERA: 1940S-2000S



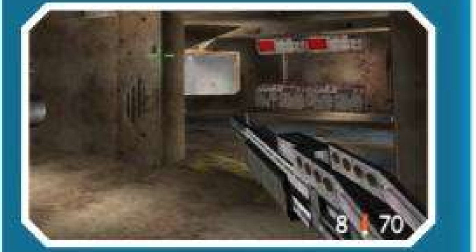
UZI

Any game that includes a dual-wielding Uzi option automatically gains 300% cool points. It's an unspoken law, or something. The *TimeSplitters* series has been making players feel like Chuck Norris since the first game thanks to this weapon's inclusion.



SILENCED PISTOL

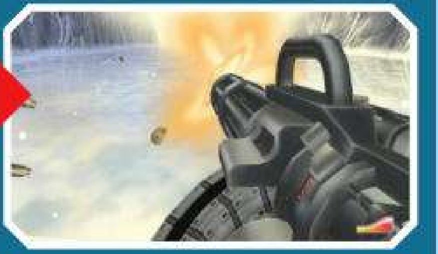
Added into the series with *TimeSplitters 2*, the silenced pistol enabled a greater focus on stealth-based missions than the original game did. It was always optional to play the game by sneaking, but without this weapon that might not have been as possible.



ASSAULT SHOTGUN

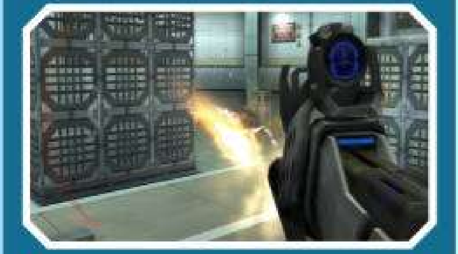
Renamed as the Tactical 12-Gauge Shotgun in the latter two games, but in any case this is perhaps one of the best weapons in the game. Despite being a shotgun, it is pretty accurate, meaning there isn't really a downside to counter its high damage and semi-automatic fire rate.

ERA: 2010S-2060S



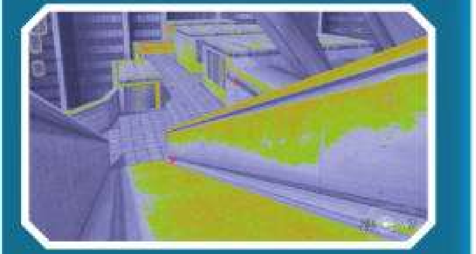
MINIGUN

Canonically, this is a hard weapon to pin down in one spot, appearing in *TS1* in 2005, in *TS2* in 2401 and in *TS3* in 2243. In any case, it's a series staple and always manages to generate a genuine thrill when one of these lands in your lap for the sheer body count it's capable of bringing about.



SBP90

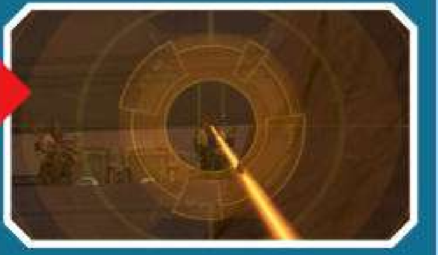
Based on the real-life P90, this first appeared in *TimeSplitters 2* with an alternative SBP500 in the third game. It's pinpoint accurate, has very little recoil, a very high clip count and even comes with a pretty unique long-range electronic scope. And it's even better when it's dual-wielded.



MAG-CHARGER

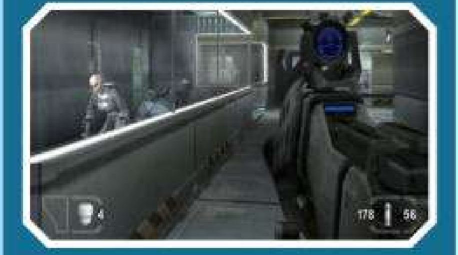
While this little toy is likely a little more futuristic than its 2052 appearance in *TimeSplitters 3*, it is a familiar weapon for anyone who played a lot of multiplayer. You see, this is a railgun and comes replete with thermal imaging equipment, which means – yes – this is the favourite of any lazy camper.

ERA: 2070S-2350S



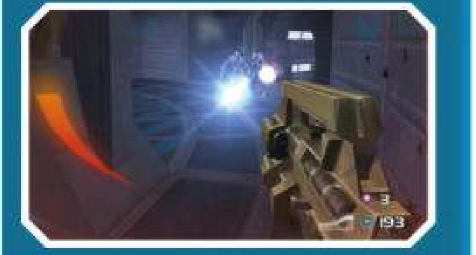
SCI-FI SNIPER RIFLE

The pinpoint accuracy of a laser lends itself well to a sniper rifle, and this one in particular has been in the series since the original game. It's a deadly weapon in the right hands, and typically accompanies missions or challenges that task a player's sharpshooting skills.



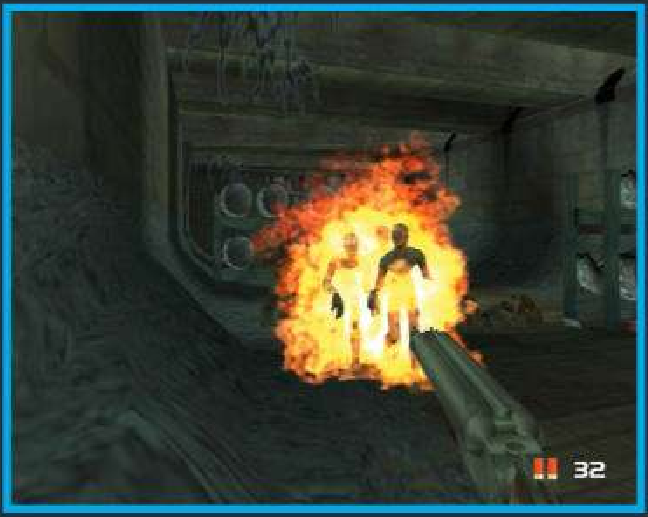
TIME DISRUPTOR GRENADE

Of the trilogy, *TimeSplitters 3* has the most variety of novel tools and weapons to play around with. The time disruptor grenade is one of the most useful, which deploys a localised wormhole that distorts time – in other words, slowing down any targets caught in its blast radius.



PLASMA AUTORIFLE

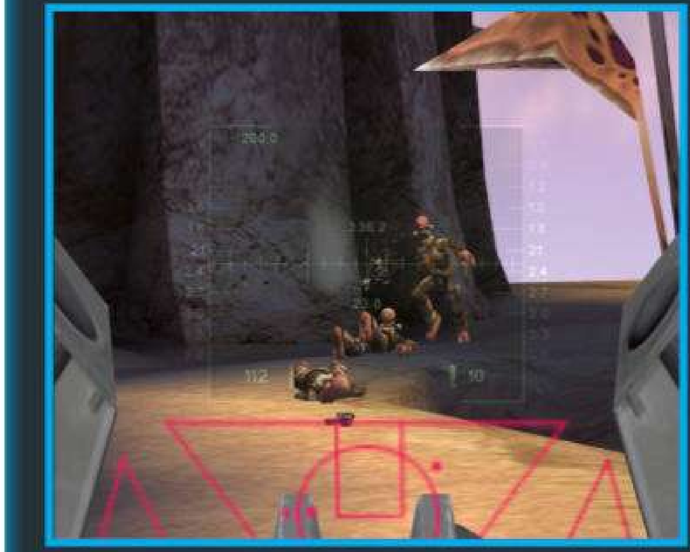
Any level set in the far-flung future is more about fast-paced, rapid-fire combat that usually leaves you feeling powerful. That's because of how readily available the powerful weapons are, but the king among them is the Plasma Autorifle: high damage, long-range and no reloading.



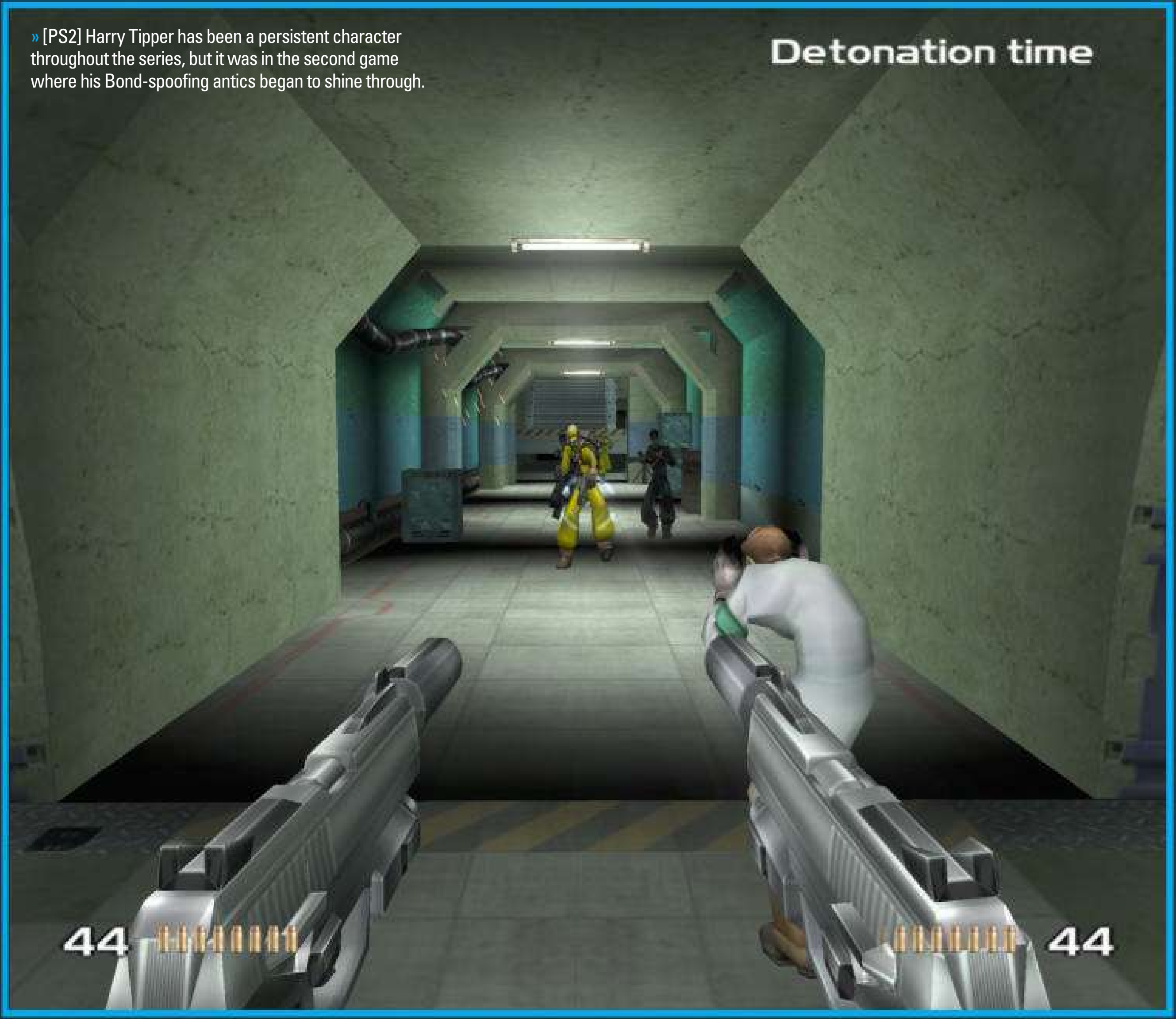
» [PS2] Of course the undead return in the sequel, and this time their missions feel a little bit more skewed towards horror.

achievement; it was incredibly hard work at the time and we were fortunate that all of the people who were now our employees had the same enthusiasm for success. We still had that same enthusiasm, so we immediately went into making *TimeSplitters 2* and fixed all things that we wanted to do in *TimeSplitters 1* but that we didn't have time to do."

This meant an improved visual fidelity, enhanced gameplay in terms of the design and structure of the missions and – more than anything – a greater focus on that time-shifting narrative that was at the heart of the original. "*TimeSplitters 1* actually has the whole *Quantum Leap* thing in there, but it wasn't made explicit," says David. "We just invented a backstory to justify it having all of the environments and time periods. *TimeSplitters 2* starts to try to communicate that backstory, although it's not like we didn't have some kind of bible of lore. It anchors the whole thing in this Cortez space war time frame, and everything that is going on is just them dipping into other realities. It's fairly lazy sci-fi, but it works." At this point, the industry was really beginning to solidify the idea of real storytelling in games, to a point that it was considered an essential part of any release – however trivial. The original game's series of menus worked for its arcadey gameplay, but a sequel had to do more in bringing a story to the forefront if it was to compete within the industry. "The *TS2* cutscenes were an absolute nightmare to get working," recalls David. "They



» [PS2] As with the original, the futuristic missions are more about high body counts than carefully aimed shots or stealthy movement.

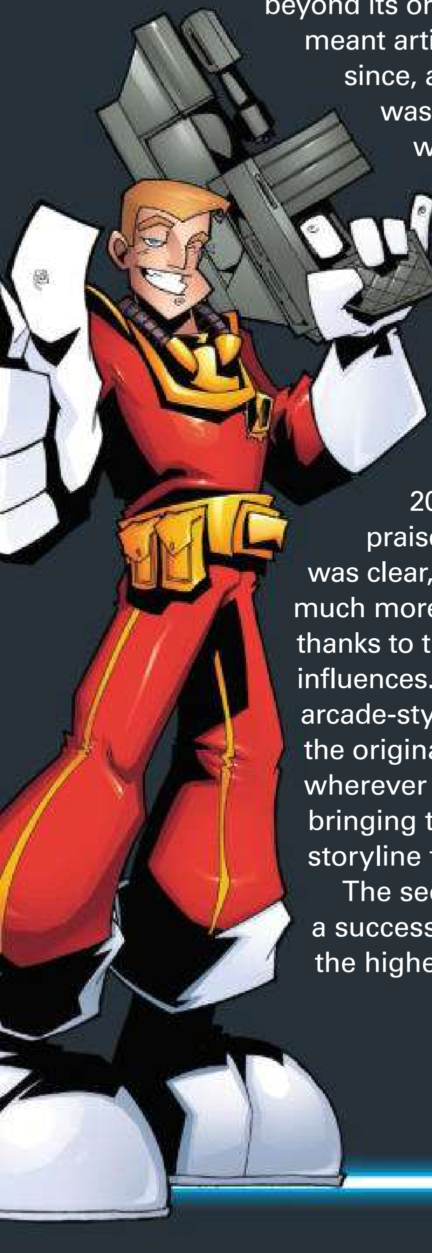


» [PS2] Harry Tipper has been a persistent character throughout the series, but it was in the second game where his Bond-spoofing antics began to shine through.

> “WE WERE ALWAYS SAYING TO EIDOS ‘YOU DIDN’T SELL ENOUGH COPIES OF IT’, AND THEY WOULD SAY ‘BUT IT WAS A BIG SUCCESS’ ”
>
> **DAVID DOAK**

look trivial by today’s standards, but we were doing all of that super expressive animation stuff, a lot of that was down to James Cunliffe, who was a really important visionary in that respect. That’s one of the things about *TimeSplitters* that I think is amazing when you look back, particularly the cutscenes, I think they all hold up really well.”

Though the team was able to grow for the development of *TimeSplitters 2*, it didn’t balloon beyond its original size. Mostly this meant artists, especially animators since, as David puts it, “animation was becoming important”. It was also important that the sequel was released across the spectrum of consoles. PS2 was a given, of course, but there were also Xbox and GameCube versions released, too, with all three releasing simultaneously in October 2002 to a great deal of critical praise. The heritage of the studio was clear, and *TimeSplitters 2* was much more well-rounded as a shooter thanks to the fairly clear *GoldenEye* influences. It took the quick, arcade-style shooting that was core to the original and enhanced it wherever it could, while really bringing the knowingly goofy storyline front and centre.



The sequel was considered to be a success, and ended up as one of the highest rated FPS games on each of the three platforms. Eidos was happy with the sales of the title, too, but Free Radical had hoped for something more. “With *TS2,* certainly from a resources point of view, we were punching well above our weight,” says David. “A company of probably under 30 people delivered something that was one of the top-rated first-person shooters on all three platforms that it was released on with massive critical response. It performed well at retail, but we felt that it hadn’t sold as well as it should’ve.” Free Radical put the blame on Eidos, who the team felt did not hold up its part of the bargain well enough. “We were always saying to Eidos ‘You didn’t sell enough copies of it’, and they would say ‘But it was a big success!’. And our answer was ‘It’s not a big success. Don’t tell us to aim lower than we’ve done before. *GoldenEye* was a big success, this is not as successful as *GoldenEye*’. It’s that relationship you have with the publisher, it’s your baby, but to them it’s another cereal box – they have other things. Your interests are never exactly aligned.” On top of this, the two companies had clashed when it came to the GameCube version, which wasn’t originally going to happen at all since Eidos had claimed that it “had no relationship with Nintendo” and therefore would not be publishing a GameCube version. It was only when Free Radical offered the rights to publish *TimeSplitters 2* on GameCube to Activision – who the studio was already in talks with regarding *Second Sight* – that Eidos back-pedalled on the decision. Needless to say, Free Radical’s relationship with Eidos was hanging by a thread, so when EA came along looking for a slice of the *TimeSplitters* pie, it ▶

ARCADE FRENZY

THE QUIRKIEST CHALLENGES THE SERIES HAS TO OFFER

BEHEAD THE UNDEAD

■ One of the more novel features of the original game was how decapitation was the quickest way to disperse zombies. The series has made a challenge out of this feature since the very beginning, and adds extra challenge by imposing various limitations.

SUPER SMASHING GREAT

■ Another one that has been a challenge since the beginning, tapping into every gamer’s therapeutic enjoyment of mindless destruction. They often come with some fun twists, such as only using bricks to shatter all the glass, or also including smaller china plates to destroy too.

MONKEY BUSINESS

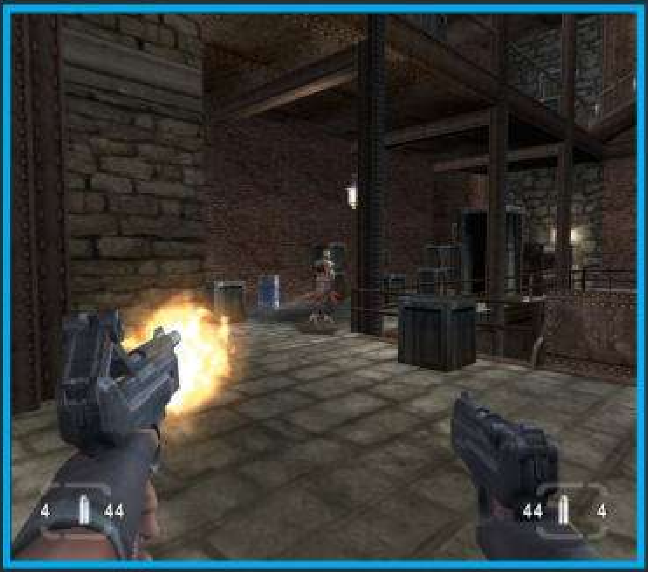
■ This branch of challenge appeared in the second game and uses the Monkey character model for some unorthodox antics. Sniping melons from the monkeys’ hands, racing to collect bananas or even sliding a chimp across ice for some impromptu curling are just some of the unusual tasks you’ll face.

CAT DRIVING

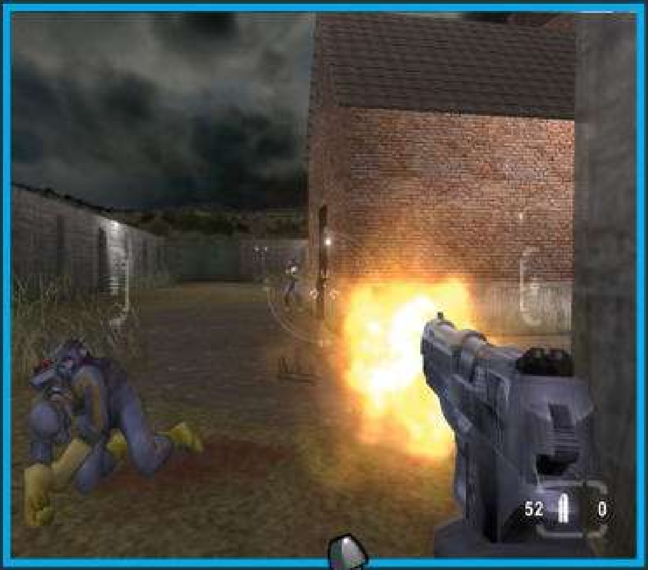
■ Reappropriating the cat model of the game’s generic villain, Khallos, this challenge asks that player’s race the unwieldy robotic cat, Strudel, around increasingly harder tracks. It’s a fun diversion, but achieving anything above bronze on these challenges is harder than it might first seem.

TSUG TIMESPLITTERS UNDERGROUND

■ *TimeSplitters 3* had a category of challenges called ‘Miscellaneous’, which had three stages that were completely different ideas. This one is arguably the most interesting with the PS2 controller split in half, with each side controlling one of the two turrets. It’s like playing split screen co-op with yourself.



» [PS2] By the time the third game came out, FPS games were moving closer towards *Call Of Duty*'s serious tone and slower gameplay.



» [PS2] *TimeSplitters 3* was intentionally silly and tongue-in-cheek; a tough sell for its publisher, EA.

> **“WE NAIVELY THOUGHT THAT EA ARE BETTER AT SELLING GAMES THAN EIDOS, SO WE ENDED UP DOING A DEAL WITH EA”**
>
> **DAVID DOAK**

didn't take much to convince the small studio to sign the third game in the series with the biggest publisher in the industry.

“We naively thought that EA are better at selling games than Eidos, so we ended up doing a deal with EA,” says David, before adding that “working with EA was disappointing”. Free Radical had ideas for the direction it wanted to take *TimeSplitters 3* and ways to improve on its successes with the second game, but there were a lot of challenges in working with its new publisher. “In my mind, you can't unpick the game from the business side at this point.” The biggest clash came from the tone of the game, with Free Radical wanting to retain a quirky, self-knowing silliness to the time-travelling antics of Cortez and the TimeSplitters. EA didn't know how to sell that, however, and wanted an aesthetic that was more in line with the serious shooters that were becoming incredibly popular at the time – and much easier to sell. “Cortez didn't look like a space marine, *TS3* was a lighter, brighter-coloured thing. We had a bunch of EA people turn up with mood boards and what they called a ‘ripomatic', which is when you get someone with some perfunctory understanding of video editing software and they grab a whole bunch of scenes from some films they like and they show it to you and they say ‘Look at this clever vision'. And their clever vision was just ‘We really like Wesley Snipes in *Blade*…'

Despite EA's marketing machine trying its hardest to shape the quirkiness of *TimeSplitters* to something it could fit into its roster, there were still improvements to the overall gameplay. “It's funny, a lot of stuff that was in *Perfect Dark* made its way into *TimeSplitters* circuitously,” says David. “We left Rare after a year and a half of *Perfect Dark* before it was released, but I think a lot of the gadget stuff and multiplayer stuff that is in *Perfect Dark*, we went back and copied a lot of it again.” This meant a lot more tools and quirky diversions to add to the “chocolate box of options”, as David puts it, such as a remote control cat, inventive new weapons and a fairly convincing virtual desktop system for hacking cameras, reading memos and playing around with the environment. David points to this version of the map maker as something that he was especially proud of with the third game, “I think it was a brilliant accomplishment. You could set up logic, game rules and share things online. Just look at *Fortnite*'s creative mode, we were trying to do all that stuff and I think we did it fairly well. But again, that was really strange because at the time, particularly Microsoft, I remember were incredibly antagonistic about it. Because they couldn't see any way to monetise it.”

Unfortunately, despite the company's best efforts, *TimeSplitters 3* was released at a time when first-person shooters were more in tune with *Call of Duty* and *Medal Of Honor* than the “lazy sci-fi” of a time-jumping space marine. The game released on PS2, Xbox and GameCube in March 2005, but despite favourable reviews was not able to garner the sales necessary to keep Free Radical going. “*Second Sight* underperformed,” recalls David, “and that was the beginning of our problems. *Future Perfect* didn't sell as well as it might've

THE WORLD OF TIMESPLITTERS

PARIS

Year: 1895

■ The Notre Dame cathedral was the star of one of *TimeSplitters 2*'s horror-centric levels, and naturally the benevolent hunchback makes an appearance as an ally. The mission itself introduces a number of characters that don't get much use afterwards, but remained popular picks for players in multiplayer due to their unique theme.

MEXICO

Year: 1920

■ *TimeSplitters 2*'s selection of levels was aimed far more at variety than at any real cohesion, so a foray through an Aztec Temple seemed as good a place to hunt for time crystals. There's a good deal of novelty here, too, such as the crossbow that is unique to this level, the chasing down monkeys and of course the typical threats of an ancient tribal palace.

Infiltrate the castle
NEW OBJECTIVE

URNSEY, SCOTLAND

Year: 1924

■ For some strange reason Free Radical chose Scotland, and the fictional island of Urnsey, to become a major plot location for the series. A significant portion of *TimeSplitters 3* is spent assaulting the antagonist's base here, but it's actually here where the TimeSplitters and the time-travelling storyline of the series all originate from.

CHICAGO

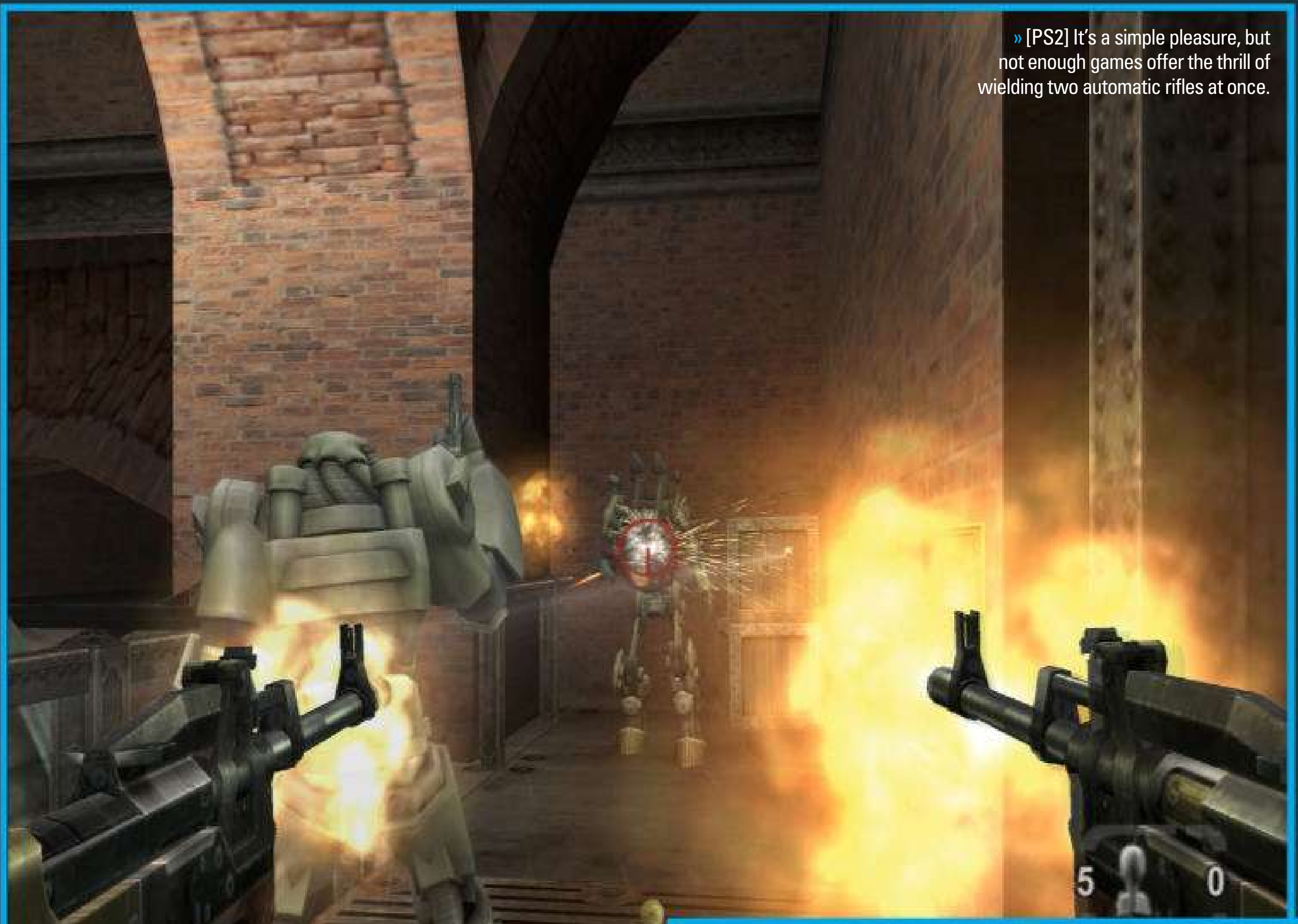
Year: 1932

■ The movie-focused heritage of the series has lent itself well to the mobster scene, especially since the iconic Tommy gun was a popular gun in the original. The mafia are the target of a mission, which actually leads to some interesting gameplay: gunning down gangsters, covert meetings with informants and all the sleuthing you'd expect.

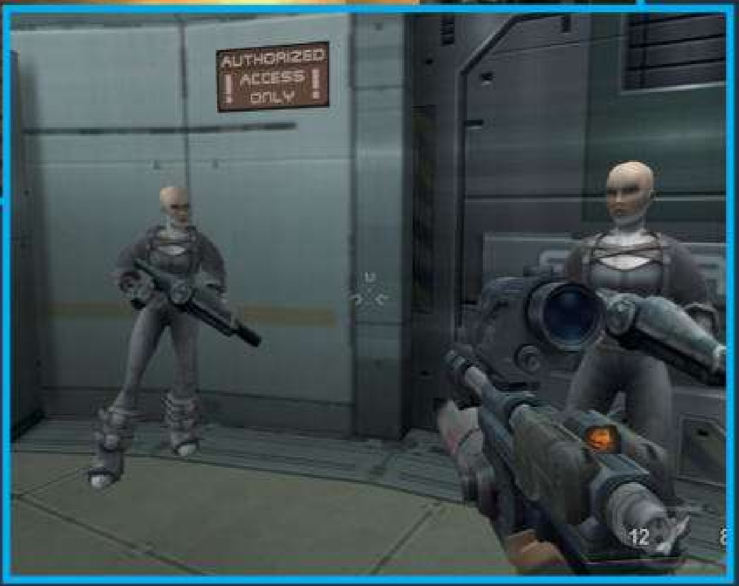
sold, I think because EA had lost interest at that stage. After that we didn't have the opportunity to make another *TimeSplitters* game, that's what we wanted to do. But we had exhausted our potential pool of publishers back then." David laughs that this was likely because Free Radical was "hard to work with because we actually cared about what we were doing", but ultimately the FPS genre had outgrown the franchise. After releasing its contemporary shooter *Haze* (which had its own failings courtesy of the new generation of consoles), there was one last ditch attempt to get the fourth game off the ground. "People go 'How the fuck did you go from making those games to making *Haze*?', and the reason was because we couldn't get deals to make the kinds of games that we were making, bizarrely," says David. "*Haze* ended up being us trying to change, to make the kind of game that publisher's were happy to fund, which is really strange looking back on it."

A year of initial development and a playable demo was all that existed of *TimeSplitters 4*, but there was just no interest from publishers, leading Free Radical into administration only to be sold to Crytek in 2009 – at which point the franchise was put on ice until "there is a demand for that type of game". A cult following has sustained the *TimeSplitters* name and this is likely why countless rumours have popped up in the last 12 years since about the glorious return of the series… but nothing has come of it yet.

Time is cyclical, however, or at least some will have us believe, and these days the industry is ripe with potential for a more atypical, tongue-in-cheek FPS. Classic shooters *Doom* and *Wolfenstein* have recently reinvigorated the genre, after all, with their modern outings proving that not every FPS these days has to live in *Call Of Duty*'s shadow. And if previous rumours of a *TimeSplitters 2 Remastered* end up being correct, it would be a timely opportunity considering *Tony Hawk's*, *Crash Bandicoot* and *Resident Evil* have all demonstrated the value that a bit of spit and polish can do for a nostalgic audience. Then there's the fact that in 2018, Koch Media announced that it had bought the rights to the franchise, and in 2019 original Free Radical, Steve Ellis, joined the company to "explore ways to bring *TimeSplitters* back". So maybe let's not call time on *TimeSplitters*, just yet… ✱



» [PS2] It's a simple pleasure, but not enough games offer the thrill of wielding two automatic rifles at once.



» [PS2] There were greater opportunities in *TS3* to reference iconic games and movies – such as this part where you enter a science facility as a doctor named Gordon…

FREE RADICAL'S SERIES LIKES TO GET ABOUT…

EGYPT

Year: 1935

■ The very first level of the series is a strong opening thanks to its unique setting, historic weaponry and surprisingly taxing difficulty. The first game didn't have much in the way of storyline tying everything together, but it does introduce the *TimeSplitters* themselves and the general fetch-quest style gameplay that makes up the original's missions.

STANIZLAV, RUSSIA

Year: 1969

■ Secret agent Harry Tipper (and his magnificent moustache) is one of the few characters to have made a significant appearance in the story missions of all three *TimeSplitters* games. Since the character brings with it a heap of James Bond references – by way of Austin Powers – his outing in Russia is full to the brim with comic relief.

SIBERIA

Year: 1990

■ This was the opening mission of *TimeSplitters 2* and introduced the new and improved gameplay quite amicably. It's a very well-designed level and preps the story of the game well, though it was criticised at the time due to its familiarity to *GoldenEye*'s opening stage. It doesn't take a lot of scratching at the surface to see why.

CONNECTICUT

Year: 1994

■ Each *TimeSplitters* game has had its horror-themed levels, and typically those are set in a haunted house. It's hard to know where the others were set with so few details given in-game about them, but considering the Mary-Beth Casey (*TS1*) and Jo-Beth Casey (*TS2* + *TS3*) association, it's safe to assume Connecticut is just filled with spooky mansions.

FRENCH SOUTH COAST

Year: 2000

■ The mission 'Docks' could be set anywhere since the *TS1* gave very few specifics when it came to such storyline aspects. The *TimeSplitters* community pose that it could be a French coastal city like Marseilles due to the French character Jacques Misère and the FAMAS-looking assault rifle, but the inclusion of a briefcase of English money is a bit suspect…

NEOTOKYO

Year: 2019

■ While in hindsight it might be hard for us to envisage a timeline where 2019 featured flying cars, roving hacker groups and a neon-drenched cyberpunk aesthetic, let's not forget that *TimeSplitters* has long paid homage to movies and videogames and in this case there's a whole lot of *Blade Runner* to discover in *TimeSplitters 2*'s mission in NeoTokyo.

GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS Resurrection

Thirty-five years after first punishing players into giving up the ghost, Capcom's notorious spooky arcade platformer is reborn for Nintendo Switch. Producer Yoshiaki Hirabayashi talks to us about what to expect from the latest instalment of a hardcore classic

Words by Alan Wen

It's been a while since the last *Ghosts 'N Goblins* so you'd be forgiven for thinking such an unforgiving series has finally been laid to rest. Yet in the past decade when modern gamers are relishing about getting good at hardcore games like *Dark Souls*, *Nioh* or *Super Meat Boy*, it seems amiss for this generation to skip out on one of the toughest games of all time – although *Ghosts 'N Goblins* and *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* did at least find their way onto releases of the NES Classic and Mega Drive Mini respectively. Better late than never, *Ghosts 'N Goblins Resurrection* is the aptly named reboot of Capcom's arcade classic.

"We thought the 35th anniversary was a great time to revisit the series and give players a chance to enjoy it again," explains producer Yoshiaki Hirabayashi. Although a reboot, it is a new instalment – albeit still following the same old-fashioned plot of brave knight Arthur donning his armour to rescue his beloved Princess from the Demon Realm.

"Recently, a lot of gamers are enjoying classic games, especially with many new classic-style games releasing, so I think the game is a great match for Nintendo Switch," continues Hirabayashi. Considering how classic and indie games make a comfortable fit on the Switch as a handheld, and that the last *Ghosts 'N Goblins* instalments were also made for portable platforms, having *Resurrection* made exclusively for Nintendo's hybrid is unsurprising.

To continue that classic gameplay, a 2D plane remains, so that, as Hirabayashi says, "Players can improve their skills within a relatively simple ruleset, and experience the pleasure and satisfaction of overcoming the challenges in the game," rather than say reboot it as a 3D game, which would ultimately draw more parallels with the PS2-era spin-off *Maximo*.

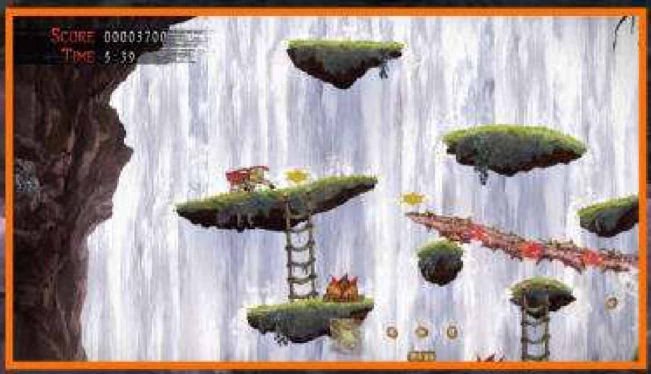
To some retro gamers' disappointment however, this new instalment doesn't utilise pixel art, yet there's a reason behind its hand-drawn visual style, which Hirabayashi likens to a "moving picture scroll". And though it may not look it, it's actually running on Capcom's in-house RE Engine so far used on detailed 3D games like *Resident Evil 7* and *Monster Hunter Rise*.

"We approached it like making a spooky but also somehow comical horror-themed amusement park, and the picture scroll idea brings a certain analogue warmth to the game which I think is really effective," says Hirabayashi. There certainly is a strangeness to seeing these formidable terrors, which includes familiar foes like Pigman, Skeleton Murderer and Red Arremer, back to ruin your day but also have a charming comical quality to them. Yet since the series began, it's also the closest the visuals accurately match the original artwork, which is arguably why, despite some mixed reaction when the game was first teased at the Game Awards in 2020, Hirabayashi believes the visual concept best preserves the series' atmosphere.

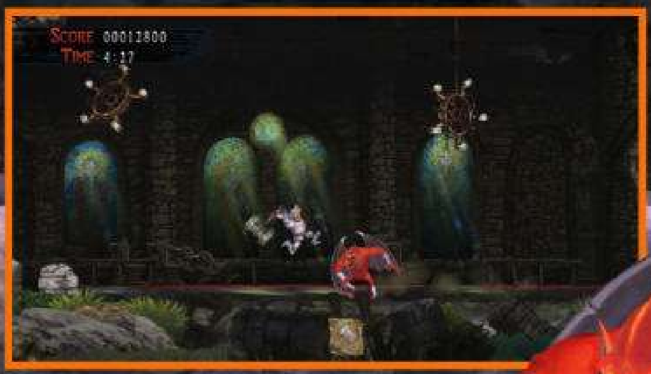
Yet with all this talk of classics and preservation, this is still meant to be a new entry to the series, with plenty of new threats and enemies likely to send players down a howling pit of despair. Hirabayashi however is keen not to spoil anything so we've had to make do with seeing modern reinterpretations of returning enemies from both *Ghosts 'N Goblins* and *Ghouls 'N Ghosts*.

IN THE KNOW

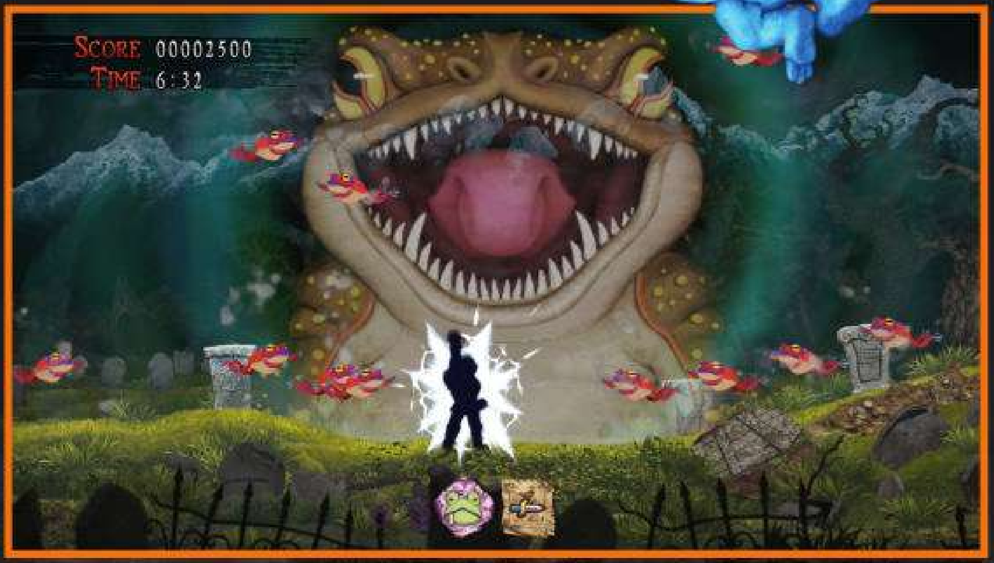
- **» PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- **» DEVELOPER:** CAPCOM
- **» RELEASE:** FEBRUARY 2021
- **» PLATFORM:** SWITCH
- **» GENRE:** ACTION



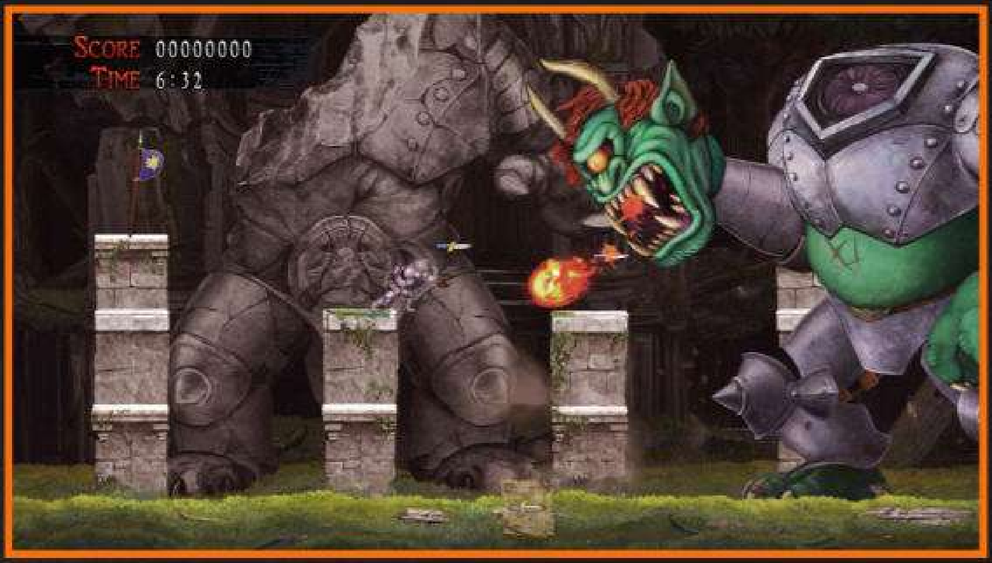
» [Switch] Golden armour remains Arthur's most powerful upgrade, though it's still just as easy to lose.



» [Switch] The new comical art style also gives characters a puppet-like animation quality.



» [Switch] One of Arthur's new spells summons a giant toad to 'transmorgifrog' enemies.



» [Switch] The extra scale and platforming layout makes classic boss encounters less straightforward.

» Yoshiaki Hirabayashi has produced a number of games at Capcom, including 2019's *Resident Evil 2* remake.

Of course, Arthur also has a variety of weapons and skills that he can acquire to surpass any challenge set in front of him. Apart from his trademark lance, there's now a total of eight weapons, a mixture from across previous games, as well as a new spiked ball that crushes anything it rolls over. More powerful however are the spells and skills, of which there plenty to unlock. "Some magic spells were tied to specific weapons in previous titles in the series," says Hirabayashi. "We've separated them out this time around in order to give you more flexibility and options. Personally, I love the skill that increases the number of weapons you can hold and lets you switch them out."

If that sounds like the game has some more approachable mechanics to distinguish it from its punishing predecessors, then masochists need not fear. While *Resurrection* is an in-house production, Capcom has nonetheless enlisted Tokuro Fujiwara, CEO of Whoopee Camp and the original director of the series to helm *Resurrection*. No doubt this ensures the hardcore gameplay beloved by its fans will remain intact. Tellingly, the tradition of having to replay harder versions of cleared stages returns, this time visualised as Shadow stages and they'll certainly test your mettle.

That isn't to say that *Resurrection* is going to smash in, chew up and spit out newcomers like a merciless ogre. Indeed, we already saw some leniency 15 years ago with *Ultimate Ghosts 'N Goblins* on PlayStation Portable, where the game featured different difficulty modes. Adding to that, the new game even has a co-op mode (a series first) and a 'magic metronome' that players can use to slow down or speed up the game. "We want players of all skill levels to be able to enjoy everything *Ghosts 'N Goblins Resurrection* has to offer," says Hirabayashi. "With these new features and difficulty options, *Ghosts 'N Goblins Resurrection* is not only a fantastic return of this classic series for existing fans, but also a great entry point for new players to experience the franchise."

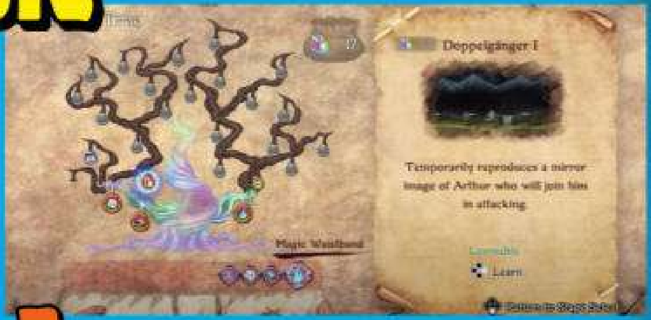
For new and returning players who can't get enough, they'll also be able to get their hands on the original arcade versions of *Ghosts 'N Goblins* and *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* on Switch via *Capcom Arcade Stadium*. The series looks well and truly back from the dead. ✱

UPDATING A CLASSIC

SCORE 00001500
TIME 6:35

1 Following *Ultimate Ghosts 'N Goblins'* multiple difficulty options, *Resurrection* introduces an even more forgiving Page mode. Allowing for on-the-spot respawn upon death, it's perfect for casual newcomers. Hirabayashi warns however, "Page mode does not allow players to experience all of the game's content."

2 The Demon Realm is larger than before, with stages that take inspiration from both *Ghosts 'N Goblins* and *Ghouls 'N Ghosts*. That doesn't mean you have to complete every stage to rescue the princess as zones also branch out, giving you the choice of which path you want to take to progress.



Doppelgänger I

Temporarily reproduces a mirror image of Arthur who will join him in attacking.

3 The Umbral Tree is a literal skill tree that unlocks a whole suite of magic spells and skills Arthur can equip and level-up. Restoring the tree requires finding Umbral Bees hidden in each stage. You can also forget and learn different skills for whatever moment arises.

Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike

THE DARRAN JONES FACTOR

» ARCADE » 1999 » CAPCOM

As a games journalist, one of the things you typically do during lunch times is play games. The games we typically used to play would be sports games or fighting games, but they would always be competitive.

I am not a good gamer, I never have been and I would often get trounced in most of the lunchtime sessions or competitions that we held. That all largely changed with the introduction of *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*. I hadn't given the original iteration of *Street Fighter III* much attention when it first came out, because I wasn't visiting arcades and like many, wasn't impressed with the roster of characters. That largely changed with *3rd Strike* and I'm pretty sure it was Leo Tan (Barrington Harvey's PR at the time) who helped get me interested in it.

Initially I would play as Elena and I could win some games, but I would largely get trounced by superior players like Ryan King, our very own Tim and Luke Albigés (god his Dudley was nasty). That all changed however once I started playing with Hugo, who remains my 'go to' character whenever I play the game. I'd like to say I went on to constantly win every game and eventually became the world champion of *3rd Strike*, but all it really meant was that playing as Hugo allowed me to win more matches than usual due to something which Luke Albigés christened 'The Darran Jones Factor'.

There was no big secret to The Darran Jones Factor, it simply involved utilising Hugo's Somersault Press (360° motion + punch) and his Gigas Breaker (720° motion + punch) as quickly as possible. Skilled players could always tell when The Darran Jones Factor was coming because A, I rotated the stick so harshly my intentions were obvious and B, I was often laughing like a lunatic while I was doing it. In fact one time I was playing with Nick, Drew and Luke and was laughing so much that tears were rolling down my cheeks.

Even I didn't ever truly know when The Darran Jones Factor would be pulled off because I just wasn't that good a *3rd Strike* player, but when it did hit it hit hard and boy, did those wins that came out of absolutely nowhere piss a lot of people off. I'm number one! ✱

4
DUDLEY
WIN

>> This month we walk through Capcom's arcade history with its new compilation, find out if Yacht Club Games' follow-up to Shovel Knight is any cop and take a look at the Switch revision of Super Mario 3D World

✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARRAN

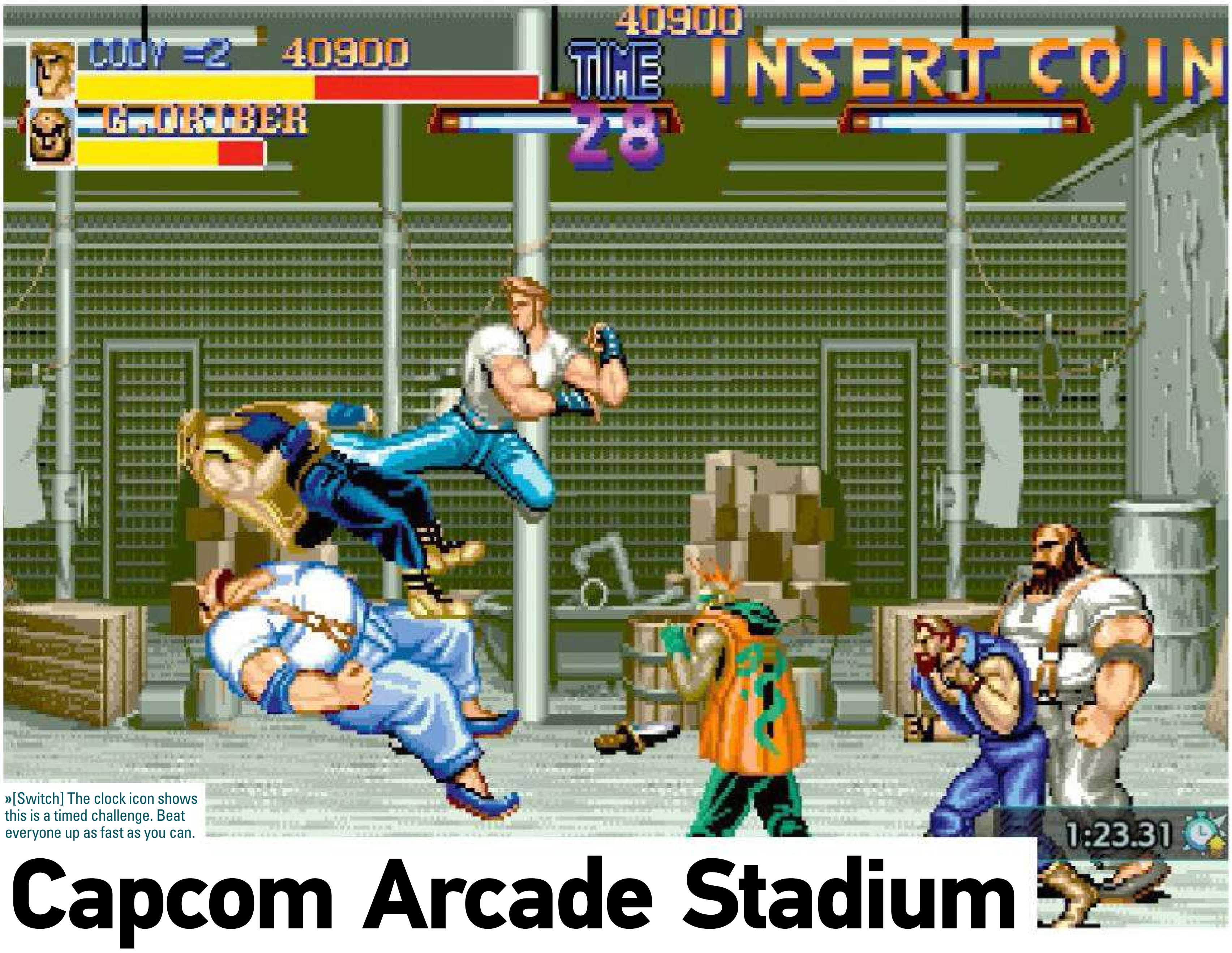
Super Mario 3D World + Bowser's Fury

While it's great to now own another portable *Strider* machine, I've really been enjoying Mario's latest platformer and its exceptionally jaunty soundtrack.

NICK

Cyber Shadow

I've anticipated what Yacht Club Games would do after *Shovel Knight* for a long time now, so this has really caught my attention.



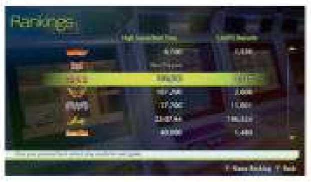
»[Switch] The clock icon shows this is a timed challenge. Beat everyone up as fast as you can.

Capcom Arcade Stadium

CLASSIC GAMES GET GIVEN A NEW LEASE OF LIFE

INFORMATION

- **FORMAT REVIEWED**
  SWITCH
- **ALSO ON:**
  NA
- **RELEASED:**
  OUT NOW
- **PRICE:**
  FREE, (IN-APP PURCHASES)
- **PUBLISHER:**
  CAPCOM
- **DEVELOPER:**
  CAPCOM
- **PLAYERS:**
  1-4



»[Switch] The ranking system is a nice way of capturing the competitive spirit found in old arcades.

Capcom is no stranger to retro compilations and has been repacking its classic arcade games since the late Nineties. With that in mind you'd expect its latest effort to be pretty good and while *Capcom Arcade Stadium* isn't perfect, it does a great job of recapturing the arcade experience of old and jazzing the included games up with several neat ways to play them.

Capcom has taken an unusual approach with *Stadium* as it's currently available to download for free and comes with *1943* and *Ghosts 'N Goblins* (the latter for a limited time only). The remaining thirty games are spread across ten packs, which you can purchase for £11.99 each or buy complete for £29.99, essentially making them £1 per game. It's an interesting approach and allows you to largely focus on the games you actually want to play. It also gives us hope that Capcom might consider adding additional packs at a later date. *Capcom Arcade Stadium* has been designed in-house and like *Ghosts 'N Goblins Resurrected*, runs on Capcom's RE Engine. The emulation quality is generally good, but it's not quite at the same level as the compilations being put out by Digital Eclipse. While we've not noticed any of the stuttering or lag that some have complained about online, some of the games do sound a little odd at times. We've been caning the likes of *Strider* and we've noticed a few glitches on its fifth level, but it's hard to say if they've always been there or if it's a result of one of the new modes that Capcom has incorporated. Generally the emulation is solid with games looking and sounding (and most importantly playing) just as you'd expect them to.

One area where *Stadium* does excel is its sumptuous presentation. You can cycle through all available games, change the ROM version (some like *Mercs* and *Trojan* are Japanese only), switch between genres or even make a selection of your favourites. Upon selecting a game you're presented with a wealth of options that range from perusing a game manual, to adjusting difficulty settings and choosing from

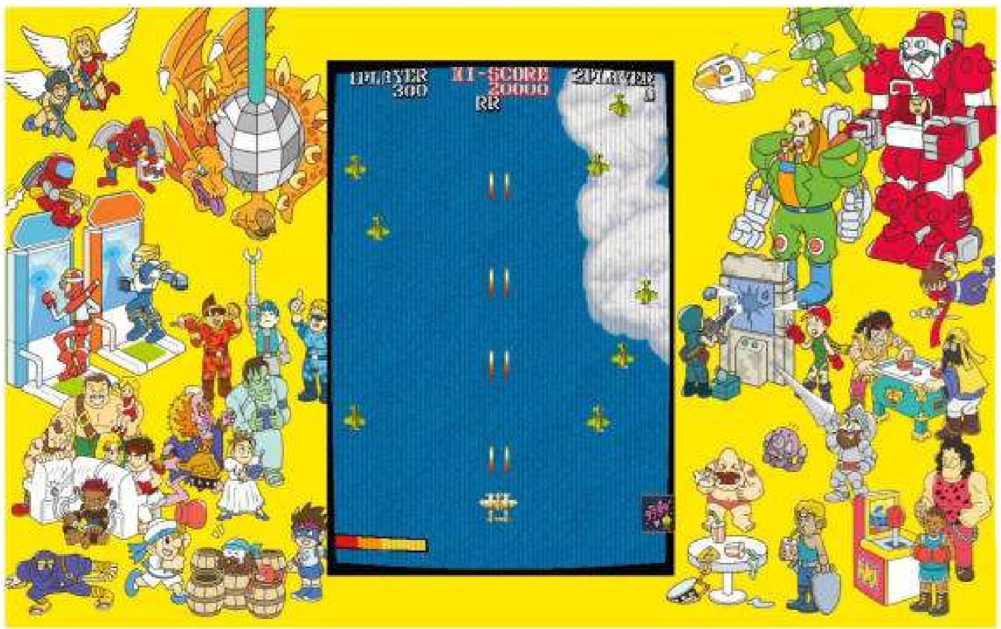
BRIEF HISTORY

» *Vulgus* launched Capcom's arcade career and the Japanese publisher soon made a name for itself with a variety of distinctive and innovative games that ranged from *1942* and *Ghosts 'N Goblins* to *Strider* and *Street Fighter II*. The company first started releasing arcade compilations on the PlayStation and Saturn and hasn't missed a generation since.

Game Manual

1P
SUBUTAI x1
53350
JOIN IN JOIN IN
YATAK

» [Switch] Stadium has a good mix of games covering a wide variety of genres. This is *Warriors Of Fate*.



» [Switch] There's not a lot of screen estate for vertical games, but you can handily rotate them. The vertical scanlines are a nice touch, too.

» [Switch] We've seen complaints about lag and judder on games like *Ghosts 'N Goblins*, but we've not noticed it.

✱ WHAT'S AVAILABLE?

STADIUM OFFERS A GREAT MIX OF GAMES

▼ FREE

- 1943: THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY
- GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS (LIMITED TIME)

▼ DAWN OF THE ARCADE

- VULGUS
- PIRATE SHIP HIGEMARU
- 1942
- COMMANDO
- SECTION Z
- TROJAN
- LEGENDARY WINGS
- BIONIC COMMANDO
- FORGOTTEN WORLDS
- GHOULS 'N GHOSTS

▼ ARCADE REVOLUTION

- STRIDER
- DYNASTY WARS
- FINAL FIGHT
- 1941: COUNTER ATTACK
- MERCS
- MEGA TWINS
- CARRIER AIR WING
- STREET FIGHTER II: THE WORLD WARRIOR
- CAPTAIN COMMANDO
- VARTH: OPERATION THUNDERSTORM

▼ ARCADE EVOLUTION

- WARRIORS OF FATE
- STREET FIGHTER II: HYPER FIGHTING
- SUPER STREET FIGHTER II TURBO
- ARMORED WARRIORS
- CYBERBOTS: FULL METAL MADNESS
- 19XX: THE WAR AGAINST DESTINY
- BATTLE CIRCUIT
- GIGA WING
- 1944: THE LOOP MASTER
- PROGEAR

a dizzying array of screen filters and wallpapers, as well as Tate options for vertically-orientated games. Interestingly, there's no 1:1 scaling which will certainly upset purists. You'll also be playing the numerous vertical games in a very small window unless you use the Tate option, which isn't ideal. The array of screen options still impresses though and it's great to see so much choice available, so if you've ever wanted to play *Bionic Commando* on a pink Mini Cute cabinet, *Stadium* allows you to do so. During play additional options allow you to customise controls, save or load games and even rewind play, which will certainly help those who find certain games too tough.

While *Stadium* sadly doesn't allow you to play games together online – multiplayer is local only – it does have some excellent social competitions that are online-based. As well as starting a normal game you also have the option of taking part in three different challenges: Timed, Score and Special. Timed challenges require you to complete the full game as quickly as possible, Score records your highest score (provided it meets the requirements, which are often quite high) while Special challenges are being offered each week and will include crazy options like playing a game at high speed or playing it upside down. This online focus is a really neat idea and is a good way of regaining the social element that made visiting arcades so much fun back in the day.

Further extras include 30 unlockable Triumphs, which work like achievements in other games and *Stadium*'s CASPO system, which stands for 'Capcom Arcade Stadium POints'. CASPO is earned through playing normal games, challenges or ranked gameplay and you'll receive more points for playing better and avoiding the use of continues or rewinds when completing a game. As your rank gets higher you'll unlock more display options to further tweak each game's appearance, meaning there's a nice little incentive to climb up the leaderboards.

So that leaves us with the games themselves and they're a solid diverse bunch covering shooters like *Vulgus*, *Carrier Airwing* and *Progear*; scrolling fighters, including *Captain Commando*, *Final Fight* and *Dynasty Wars*, as well as platformers like *Strider*, *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* and *Mega Twins*. Three versions of *Street Fighter II* are also included, as well as *Cyberbots*, but interestingly, Capcom has neglected to include any of its other one-on-one brawlers like the *Alpha* games or the *Darkstalkers* series. Perhaps we'll get those in a later downloadable pack? There's a distinct lack of puzzle games and no licensed stuff like the *Dungeons & Dragons* games or *Alien Vs Predator*, but the included games still do a great job of highlighting Capcom's impressive arcade legacy.

While we've thoroughly enjoyed *Stadium* we do have a few issues with it. The emulation isn't quite up to the standard we've seen in more recent compilations and there's a disappointing lack of historical extras. Maybe we've been spoilt by the likes of *Rare Replay* and *SNK 40th Anniversary Collection*, but it's a shame Capcom couldn't find time to go through its archives and find artwork, interviews or any other goodies. They're not dealbreakers however and the new challenge modes go a long way into breathing new life into a selection of often familiar games. ✱

In a nutshell

It might be lacking in historical content, but the included online extras, great selection of games and distribution system means you'll be able to build a great collection of classics at very little cost.

>> Score **83%**

✱ PICK OF THE MONTH

Cyber Shadow

» System: Switch (tested), PS4, Xbox One, PC, Mac **» Buy it from:** Online **» Buy it for:** £17.99

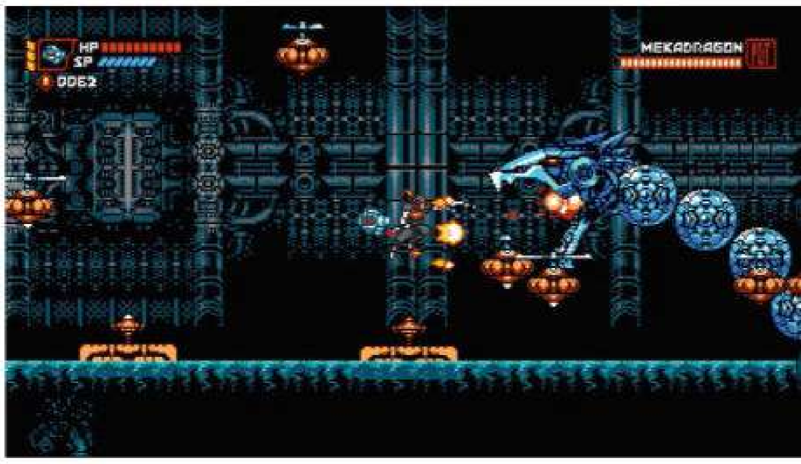
Shadow's ninja clan is on the brink of destruction, his master's gone missing and Meka City is being devastated by synthetic creatures. If that all sounds very Eighties, it's pretty deliberate as *Cyber Shadow* is very clearly influenced by the likes of *Ninja Gaiden* and *Contra*. It wears those influences on its sleeve too, with a NES-inspired aesthetic that conveys the moody atmosphere well while allowing for some slightly more modern touches like parallax backgrounds.

Cyber Shadow starts you out pretty gently, with Shadow initially capable of nothing more than running, jumping and attacking with the katana. This can make the game feel quite limited at first, but Shadow's skills develop at a satisfying pace – you earn new skills frequently during the game's earlier chapters, with each section designed to challenge your mastery of your new abilities. By the middle of the game, you can throw shurikens, slide on walls, shoot fireballs into the air and more.

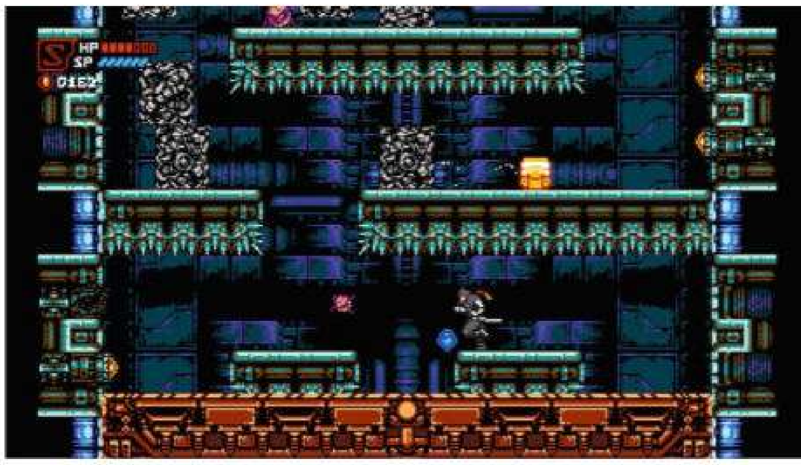
You'll really need all of those abilities too, as *Cyber Shadow* is no pushover. There are plenty of tough sections in each stage, and bosses are likely to utterly crush you during your first encounters. This is for the most part welcome, but the fun can sometimes tip over into frustration. Checkpoints can sometimes be a bit too far apart, leading to resentment at having to repeat some fairly long parts of stages over and over again, and there are some authentically 8-bit bugbears too – it always sucks to be knocked backwards into an instant death trap, for example. Fortunately, you do at least have infinite lives.

Still, *Cyber Shadow* manages to keep things interesting, with stages that look and feel quite different to one another – sometimes you'll be dodging writhing growths as they squirm ever closer, at other times you'll have to stay on the move in outdoor areas to avoid a laser cannon. So while you may find yourself deciding to take a break and simmer down, it's pretty likely that you'll come back for more.

>> Score **85%**



»[Switch] Boss encounters aren't deceptive – if you're failing, you just need to do what you're doing, but better.



»[Switch] Yes, it's one of those classic elevator sections where you need to dodge around platforms.

RYO
MORRIGAN
36
COUNTER
retro GAMER SIZZLER

SNK Vs Capcom: Match Of The Millennium

» System: Switch **» Buy it from:** Online
» Buy it for: £7.19

***Match Of The Millennium* is a brilliant crossover fighter, with an astonishing set of features for a handheld game from 1999.** The game features 18 characters drawn from series including *Street Fighter*, *Darkstalkers*, *The King Of Fighters* and *Samurai Shodown*, with a further eight to unlock. You've got the choice of one-on-one fights, *KOF*-style three-person team battles, or actual tag team fights. Time Attack and Survival modes are present, and if you get bored of fighting, there are even some cool minigames to play. If you've had any interest at all in picking up the Neo Geo Pocket Color fighting games that have been making their way to the Switch, make sure you grab this.

>> Score **90%**

Coin-Op: The Arcade Guide

» Buy it from: greyfoxbooks.com **» Buy it for:** €35.44

COIN-OP
THE ARCADE GUIDE
INSERT COINS
TO PLAY

If you're looking for an in-depth peek behind the scenes of classic arcade hits, Darren Doyle's new book may disappoint, as interviews are infrequent through its 300-odd pages. If however you simply want to bath in arcade goodness, *Coin-Op: The Arcade Guide* is certainly up to the task. A number of different genres are covered, from horror to arcade racers, and all the big hitters make it in. It looks lovely too, with a large number of gatefolds and plenty of great imagery on display, as well as numerous pieces of art from the era. It's a little rough around the edges for the price point, but as a largely single-person endeavour (it's written, published and designed by Darren) it's hard not to be impressed.

retro GAMER SIZZLER

Super Mario 3D World + Bowser's Fury

» System: Switch **» Buy it from:** Retail, online
» Buy it for: £49.99

We were wowed when we first played Nintendo's exceptional platformer on Wii U and the years have done nothing to sway our feelings of it. It remains an excellent addition to the *Mario* series and it now has numerous tweaks, including online multiplayer and a photo mode. The biggest addition however is *Bowser's Fury*, which sees you teaming up with Bowser Jr to collect a large number of Cat Shines. You need to be careful though, as Fury Bowser routinely pops up to cause you trouble as you explore. *Super Mario 3D World* is arguably one of the best 3D *Mario* games, and the inclusion of *Bowser's Fury* makes it incredibly hard to ignore, even if you have already completed it.

>> Score **95%**

TAKE A JOURNEY THOUGH VIDEOGAMING HISTORY

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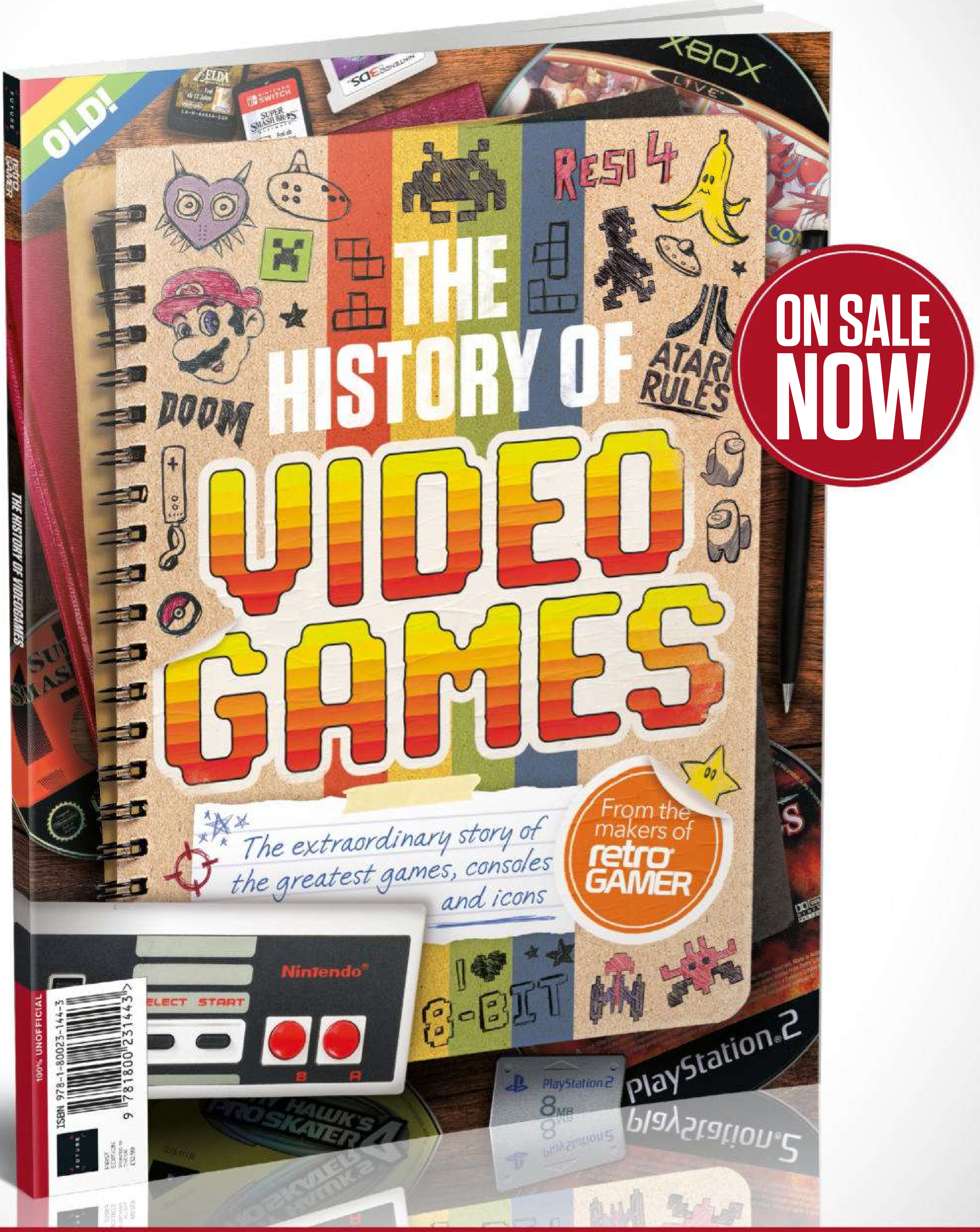

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KEEPING COLLECTIONS

The team discuss collecting games

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

While it's perfectly possible to enjoy retro games without taking up whole rooms of your house, many of us still choose to follow the path of relentless acquisition in the pursuit of building collections. We recently took the time to examine our own approaches to this, and why we've adopted them.

NICK
Here's a nice and simple question to start us off – to what extent do you consider yourself to be a game collector?

DARRAN
Well I must have around 1,000 physical games across both retro and modern systems so I'm absolutely a collector.

NICK
For me, I've got about 1,200 games so I'm undeniably a collector. But I'm not 100% happy with the label, as there's a lot about the collector's market that I can do without.

TIM
I'm not a collector. I used to be, sort of, in that I kept all the games I'd bought – but it was never about building a collection. But then when I moved to England I just gave away all my PlayStation games to a mate. After that was a cycle of buying and trading in games after I finished them, so I never built up much of a collection ever again. So these days I'm pretty much all about digital downloads, which is just further exacerbated by the likes of Game Pass. I just don't feel the need to build up a load of stuff that will just end up in boxes, or sitting on a shelf. I don't often replay games I've already finished with.

DARRAN
What don't you like about collecting, Nick?

NICHOLAS
The term 'collector' tends to imply a fussiness that I don't identify with. There's a lot tied up in condition and completeness of games that I'm ultimately pretty indifferent to.

DARRAN
That's a fair point. It's interesting as we all collect in a different way. I won't willingly buy anything that isn't complete, while that isn't an issue for you at all is it.

NICK
Nope, I'm quite happy with loose carts. Don't get me wrong, if it's a small difference I'll probably grab a nicer copy of a game if I have the choice. But for plenty of systems, the difference is just enormous and I can't justify dumping a bunch of money on some cardboard to look nice on a shelf.

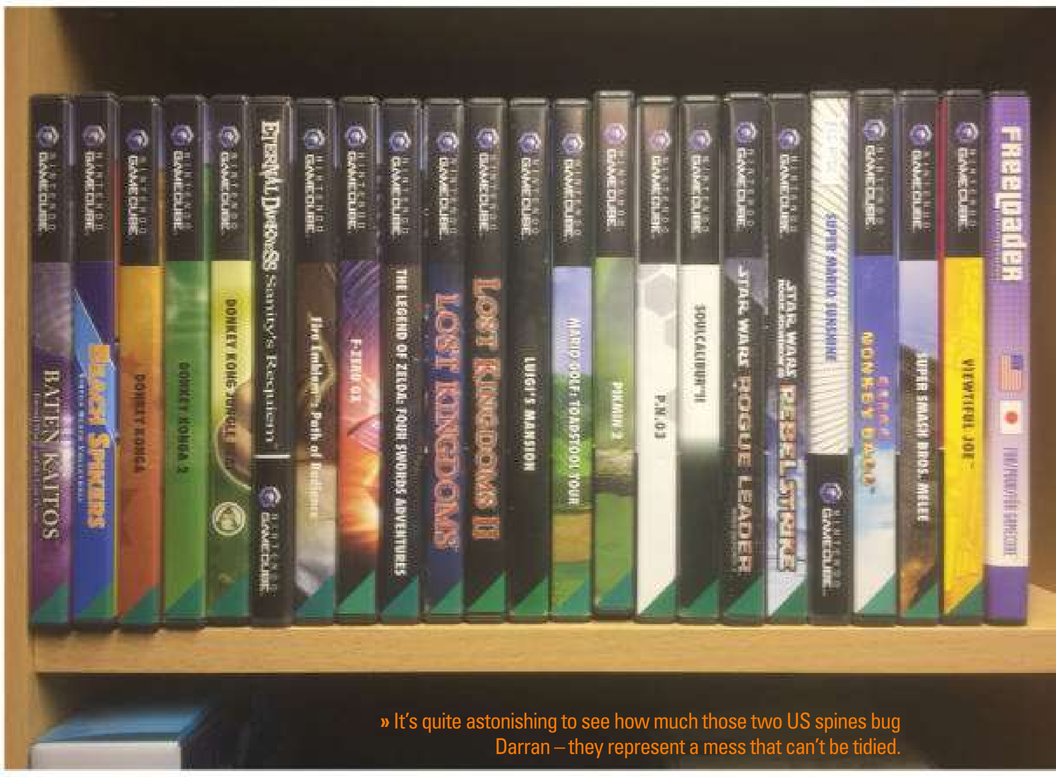
DARRAN
Tim, are you happy knowing you may not get to keep those games forever if they're digital?

TIM
I don't mind not keeping them at all. Even games I've bought online eventually get deleted when I need some hard drive space (*Doom* from 2016 was one of those.) I've no attachment to them, maybe I'm missing out?

DARRAN
I know gamers who are a big fan of the Everdrive/modded SD approach but for me part of collecting is holding the games, admiring the box art and putting the cart in the machine. It's like a delicious ritual and I couldn't have one part without the others.

FUEL
1UP 000275
3
HI 008185
2UP 000000
FUEL

» [Xbox One] Tim would rather catch up with classics on a compilation, making him arguably the most sensible of us.



» It's quite astonishing to see how much those two US spines bug Darran – they represent a mess that can't be tidied.

NICK
You're very particular about how your collection looks too, right? I remember you actively replacing European DS games with US ones because you preferred the look of the US boxes.

DARRAN
That's right, I disliked how much space they took up and how ugly they looked compared to the punchier US and Japanese spines. I do sometimes wonder if there's something unbalanced in me as looking at them was making my genuinely anxious.

TIM
Why were you getting anxious looking at them?

DARRAN
Because they look untidy mate.

I have the same issue with my Switch games. Some regions are centralised spines and some are left justified. They look terrible all lined up. GameCube was the same as well, very stressful.

DARRAN
So what drives you to collect, Nick?

NICK
Honestly, it was something I fell into. I just never felt like getting rid of anything – partly because I like to revisit games, and partly because I grew up poor and have a pretty hard time letting go of material possessions.

DARRAN
I think there's a fine line between collecting and hoarding and many of us do it or have done it, but won't admit to it. I can certainly

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RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

» Nick's quite happy with loose carts for systems like the SNES, where complete copies command enormous premiums.

» [Dreamcast] Darran previously found himself drawn to owning the consensus 'best' games for a console, even ones he doesn't enjoy like *Shenmue II*.

31960
II 10:36
ACTIVISION

» [Atari 2600] Nick's lack of regard for boxes probably comes from the £1 loose carts bought as a treat from the market.

» [Mega Drive] None of us chase full collections on any system. Who needs all those annual sports games?

» [PS2] Please don't pay £500 for *Shadow Of The Colossus*, a complete copy with art cards is worth about £20 max.

» Though Nick buys games cheaply, he tends to spend those savings on improving the play experience with equipment like the OSSC.

feel overwhelmed by my stuff at times. Do you ever feel that?

NICK
Most of the time, I'm happy with what I have. The only time I start to have negative feelings is when I have to move it, but then I hate moving house anyway.

DARRAN
When my collection feels it's getting out of hand I always think of Tyler Durden's line from *Fight Club*, "The things you own end up owning you." Collect if that's what you enjoy, but don't let it become an obsession. If you don't enjoy the things you're collecting then get rid of them.

TIM
I guess if they do appreciate in value then it's not too bad a thing when you eventually decide to sell them off.

NICK
Definitely, although collecting as an 'investment' is another dangerous avenue we don't have space to cover properly this issue.

DARRAN
I agree with you, Nick. You'd be better off putting your money into the bank. Or Lego…

TIM
Darran, I've a cardboard box copy of *Shadow Of The Colossus* – it could be yours for just £500!

DARRAN
Don't tempt me. Although it would go nice with my copy of *God Hand*… Oh no! Nick! It's happening again! ✱

READERS REACT

What ways do you go about handling your collection?

DecafToaster
I prefer loose copies as they tend to be cheaper and most folks pass those up – more for me. Beyond the game working, I'm not concerned with it's physical condition. I tend to look for N64, GameCube, and Nineties-Noughties PC games that interest me.

John Dover
I tend to go for items that have a personal connection, like Parker Bros Atari games or Spectrum compilations. Just about affordable and it's fun to hunt them down.

Skippy B Coyote
I pretty much just go cart only these days, unless it's a disc-based game then complete in box is kinda necessary for storage and display reasons. At this point I really only collect for the Sega Genesis and Game Boy/Color though, since collecting has gotten crazy expensive.

Sonic Down Under
Always complete. Though sometimes I have multiple copies of a game because one has a better cover condition. Another has a good quality booklet. I don't like to mix and match my games to have a complete mint one. I like them as they are, haha!

Retro Gaming Geek
I collect to have a fair representation of each console I own. The main AAA titles for a console I will target and pay for, then pick up cheaper filler titles as and when I see them. Complete is nice, but not always practical with cardboard box games.

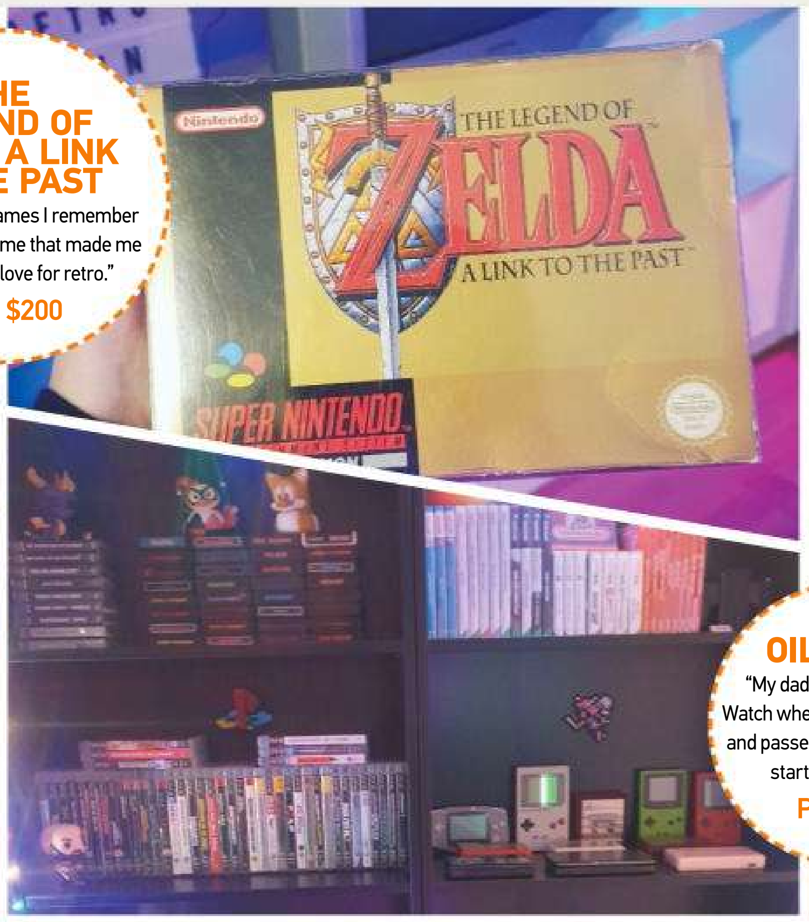
ShanesRetroGames
My preference is to buy broken/non-working games and repair them. It is how I have built up a fair bit of my collection.

zx_spectrum_30
For cassettes it needs the inlay/box – can live without instruction sheets if a rarer title. If fully complete, including shiz like badges, posters, etc. I'll keep stuff that I wouldn't otherwise collect.

The Lost Retro Tapes
Currently trying to collect all *Edge* magazine 9 and 10s and also all *Crash* Smashes. Complete collections don't really interest me that much, I just want good games!

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST

"One of the first games I remember playing and the game that made me rediscover my love for retro."

PAID: $200

OIL PANIC

"My dad had this Game & Watch when he was a teenager and passed it on to me when I started collecting!"

PAID: $0

THE RETRO RESTORATIVE

Elin Eriksson discusses her love for RPGs

BIO

NAME:
Elin Eriksson

LOCATION:
Sweden

FAVOURITE GAME:
Chrono Trigger and Terranigma

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
SNES

COLLECTION WORTH:
'No idea!'

TWITTER:
@elininis

INSTAGRAM:
@retro.elin

As we recently discussed in Retro Gamer, retro can mean a lot of different things to different people, with age playing a key part in what we consider to be retro. For 25-year-old Elin Eriksson from Sweden, the Super Nintendo had already been around a while and begun to wane in popularity by the time she picked up a controller. The power of the SNES, and one particular genre of game in particular, drew her in. "Although arguably not a [traditional] RPG, it was when my brother bought me a copy of *Illusion Of Time* that it opened the door to me and the world of RPGs," remembers Elin. "It introduced me to *Terranigma*, which quickly became one of my favourite games and my hunger for RPGs grew more and more!"

While Elin also plays modern games – her second favourite console of all time is the Xbox 360 – it is the SNES that always wins her heart as she explains, "SNES games are timeless – they're still just as fun, gorgeous and playable today as they were back then and it's hard not to be addicted. To experience many of the games for the first time is really a treat." It's not just the console that has proved a pivotal part of Elin's life. The retro world and community has played an important role in her own personal development and health. The giveaway of this is on her left arm and a tattoo that reads 'Earthbound Misfit', a reference to not only the famous SNES game, but also a lyric from Pink Floyd's song *Learning To Fly*. "I always took the term as someone who was bound to live their life on this planet, despite not fitting in," explains Elin. "When I was in my teenage years, I was very sick and undiagnosed. I felt misplaced, misunderstood, like a misfit, born on the wrong planet." Elin's fascination for space completes the tattoo with an iconic alien from *Space Invaders* hovering menacingly over the 't' of 'misfit'.

SOUL BLAZER

"I wanted it for a long time but it was too pricey – one day I got it as a gift from a friend, for free! So it's special because of the very kind and sweet gesture from my friend."

PAID: $0

Fortunately, there's a happy ending. "The gaming community has not only made me realise that the world is not quite as evil as I once thought, but I also have a whole new appetite for life because of it. I feel loved and accepted, my voice is being heard and to me that's crazy!" Where she was once too shy to even consider going out, Elin today has the confidence from her retro following and the love of the community to go out into the real world and make new friends – and appear in **Retro Gamer**. And while her collection is far from expansive – collecting retro videogames in Sweden is hugely expensive – with almost 30 consoles and 400 games, many of them in impeccable condition, there's much love and appreciation in her retro hideaway. "My mom is my biggest fan and we've even done a SNES stream together on Twitch," grins Elin. "People around me think it's absolutely wonderful that I've found a passion that keeps me happy." All hail the restorative power of retro gaming! *

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

ATARI HOCKEY PONG

"My most exotic item. I got it for $90 from a Swedish auction site."

PAID: $90

TERRANIGMA

"My favourite game of all time – tied with *Chrono Trigger* – and the priciest game I have in my collection. It's the game that pulled me into the SNES RPG world."

PAID: $400

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

NTSC SNES, COMPLETE

- "I'd wanted one for a while as I'd heard the games weren't really working with converters. It's special to me because I bought it off a friend and it's in such good condition. Everything about it is complete and intact."

PAID: $150

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE MAIN EVENT

SUPER MARIO WORLD

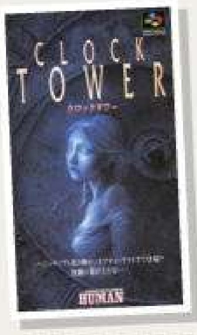
Voted the number-one Nineties game of all time by the readers of **Retro Gamer**, the popularity of this legendary game ensures its value remains stable. As ever with Nintendo games, prices vary wildly. Loose carts are very common and generally sell for under ten pounds; but if you follow the condition ladder all the way to the top, it's not unknown for immaculate sealed copies to fetch between **£1,500** and **£2,500**.

BMX SIMULATOR

This popular first release by Codemasters sold a bike-shed load back in 1986, and can be picked up for around **£2-£3** on its own, or even less in a bundle. More than its original low price of **£1.99**, but still an absolutely brilliant bargain.

BUCK ROGERS: COUNTDOWN TO DOOMSDAY

If you're looking for a Mega Drive RPG fix, then this SSI/EA game is a bargain with boxed auctions generally stalling in the mid-teens, while the lone cart can sometimes be snared for under a tenner. After the Amiga, C64 or PC versions? Be prepared to wait much longer and pay much more, especially complete.

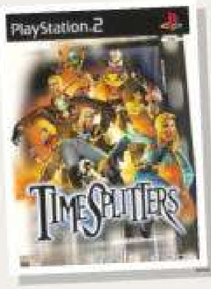


CLOCK TOWER

All the games from this survival horror series tend to fetch decent prices and the Super Famicom original is no exception. Expect to pay **£50-60** for cart only with a decent box and manual boosting the price over **£100** – plus import charges if you're buying from Japan, which is likely.

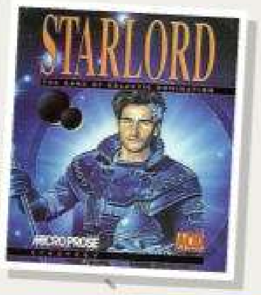
FIGHTERS MEGAMIX

This mish-mash of various Sega fighting games is a good way of experiencing the different characters without parting with a fistful of dollars. When it's in stock CeX offer it for **£25** while auctions on eBay generally finish around **£15-£20** depending on condition.



TIMESPLITTERS

This PlayStation 2 launch title was a huge seller making copies on eBay and beyond easy to track down. If you pay more than a **£5**, you're most likely in the wrong time zone.



STARLORD

Surprisingly this Commodore Amiga strategy game can be picked up in good condition for a price rarely seen with cardboard big box games of the era. Even a copy honourably tested by the seller is unlikely to cost more than **£15** on eBay.

HOW MUCH?!

PAL NES CART BUNDLE

We love a bundle at **Retro Gamer**, and this recent auction caught our eye. Containing 167 unboxed NES games with no doubles, there were plenty of nice titles such as *Solar Jet Man* and *Legend Of Zelda*. Nonetheless, a final eye-watering price of **£1,721** suggests that some bidders may have gotten a little carried away on this occasion with a price of over **£10** per loose cart a little on the high side for such a bundle.

Prices correct at time of print

MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR **SHARED PASSION**

DOUBLE THE FUN

Darran champions Nintendo's best-selling handheld

I've always enjoyed handheld systems and after reading about Nick's love for the Neo Geo Pocket Color in last month's issue, I thought I would talk about my own personal favourite – Nintendo's DS. I can still remember the buzz around Nintendo's console when it was first announced back in January 2004. I was working on *gamesTM* at the time and I was intrigued by the promise of the console's dual screens and what that meant in terms of game mechanics.

As the year progressed and more and more information about the DS was revealed, I knew it was something I had to own, and not just because I could play my Game Boy Advance games on it. Many of my friends were far more interested in the incoming PSP (I bought a Japanese one myself), but there was something whimsical about the DS, something about it that even then, suggested it would be a little different to the norm. While other team members delayed their preorders in the hope that they would get a system directly from Nintendo, I emptied my wallet and ordered a US system and copies of *Spider-Man 2*, *Super Mario 64 DS* and *Feel The Magic: XY/XX*.

Those expected consoles from Nintendo didn't turn up immediately so I was one of the first people in the office to have the machine and I absolutely adored it. While controlling Mario was a bit of a bugger with the silly thumbstrap that Nintendo had supplied with the console, the game itself was still exceptionally good fun and the new minigames made great use of the console's unique capabilities. This was also true of *Feel The Magic* (or *Project Rub* as it was called over here) which amped things up considerably by offering a selection of inventive minigames that had you rubbing the stylus vigorously to stop a poor fellow choking on goldfish, or bellowing into the DS' microphone in order to catch the attention of your would-be girlfriend. Why have I not mentioned *Spider-Man 2* yet? Well because it was rubbish, that's why.

As the months passed I would hoover up any interesting games, either reviewing them for our own mag or for sister magazine, *Cube* and my collection began to grow. While the DS was famed for its dual screens and stylus use, not every game made great use of them. Many companies were simply content on using that second screen as a map, keeping the action to the top screen. Stylus-based games could also feel wishy-washy at times and it was always easy to see which games used it as an afterthought and which games were built around it.

There were plenty of games that did make full use of the DS though and while they weren't always perfect, you couldn't help but be impressed by their sheer inventiveness. *Pac-Pix* and *Pac 'N Roll* breathed new life into Pac-Man, *Kirby: Power Paintbrush* gave you a new way to experience Masahiro Sakurai's popular character, while *Trauma Centre* turned your stylus into a scalpel, with the power to save patients or accidentally end their lives.

Nintendo's console wasn't a graphical powerhouse, but it didn't need to be and while Sony's PSP concentrated on giving you home console games in the palm of your hand, Nintendo's focused on offering numerous games that simply could be played any other way. That's not to say there weren't traditional games on Nintendo's machine (*Mario Kart DS* is as conventional as they come) but I would often find myself drawn to the more unusual titles on the console and many of my favourites remain those that revolved around heavy stylus use.

Nintendo may have originally referred to the DS as a 'third pillar' when it was first announced, but it soon became obvious that that pillar was doing an exceptionally good job of recouping the losses Nintendo had announced the year before the system launched. Like the Wii that came later, using a stylus was obvious to anyone, even if they didn't typically play games and a mixture of clever marketing and gateway games like *Nintendogs* and *Brain Training* meant you were just as likely to find the DS in the hands of a grandma as you were a hardcore gamer. I'll even make the argument that the DS paved the way for the success of the many bite-sized games that appeared on Apple's iPhone.

A few years ago I started rebuilding my DS collection and I was delighted to discover that many of the games I had first experienced on their original release still held up. The vast majority of my games are from the US, partly because that's where my original system came from and partly because I find the European boxes ugly and bulky. (I eventually replaced all my UK games with US versions with the exception of exclusive titles like *Freshly-Picked Tingle's Rosy Rupeeland* and *Daigasso! Band Brothers*.) While I've still not touched many of the games I've picked up, I still managed to complete a decent number, including *Hotel Dusk: Room 215*, *Pokémon Conquest*, *Castlevania: Dawn Of Sorrow*, *Professor Layton And The Curious Village*, *WarioWare Touched!* and *Dragon Quest Heroes: Rocket Slime*.

When I think about the DS the word I associate with the console isn't underpowered or gimmicky, but fun. That fun was clearly felt by others too, as it became Nintendo's best-selling handheld of all time shifting over 152 million units, nearly 50 million more than the Game Boy Advance and GameCube combined. Not bad for a third pillar, eh? ✱

MY TOP 5

YOU'LL ALWAYS FIND THESE GAMES NEAR MY DS

CONTRA 4

A fantastic shooter by WayForward that sadly never got released in the UK.

PLANET PUZZLE LEAGUE

While I think *Tetris DS* is the better game, this is the one I constantly return to.

OSU! TATAKAE! OUENDAN

A truly excellent rhythm action game, with the beautiful *Over The Distance* being the highlight song.

CASTLEVANIA: DAWN OF SORROW

This is a great follow-up to *Aria Of Sorrow*, with some very enjoyable boss fights.

QUICK SPOT

It's basically spot the difference, but it has loads of great references to Namco games in it.

[DS] IT'S EASY TO DISMISS GAMES LIKE NINTENDOGS, BUT THEY ATTRACTED LARGE NUMBERS OF NON-GAMERS.

A SELECTION OF MY ENGLISH LANGUAGE GAMES THAT ARE EITHER EXCLUSIVE TO THE US OR EUROPE.

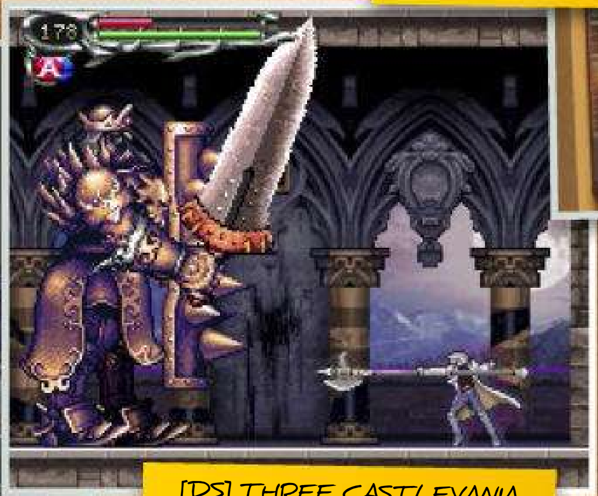
Rhythm Heaven
Pac-Pix
Trauma Center Under the Knife
Cooking Mama
Touched!
Kirby

THE STYLUS HAS ITS DETRACTORS BUT I'D ARGUE ALL OF THESE GAMES ARE BETTER FOR USING IT.

Brain Age
Chrono Trigger
Clubhouse Games
Cooking Mama
Rocket Slime
Final Fantasy Tactics A2
Flash Focus
Ghost Trick
Lost in Blue
Magnetica
Meteos
Metroid

HERE'S HALF OF MY COLLECTION. US AND JAPANESE GAMES HAVE SMALLER CASES AND LOOK FAR PUNCHIER ON THE SHELF.

Last Window



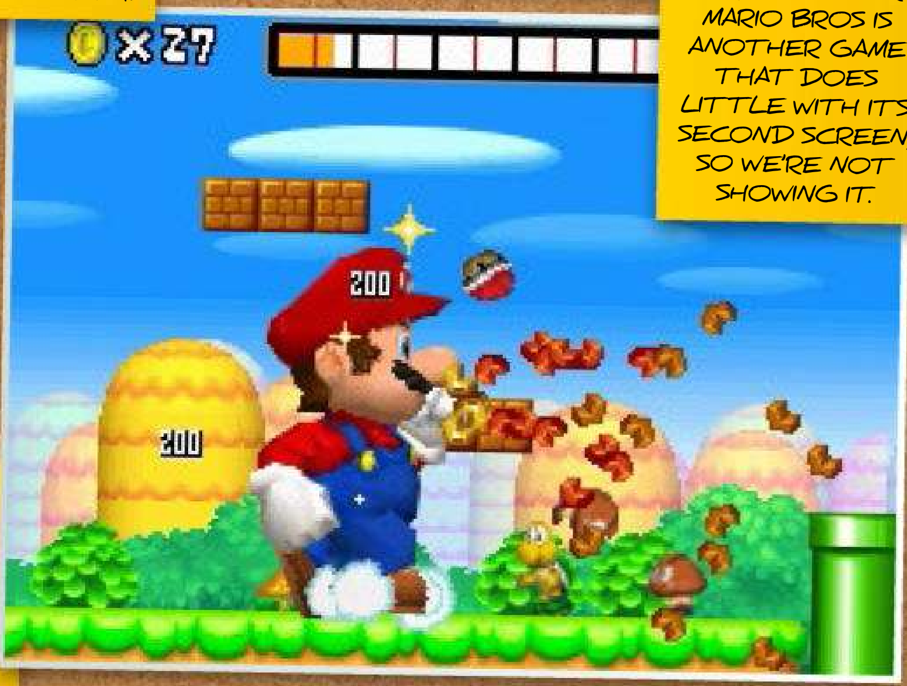
[DS] THREE CASTLEVANIA GAMES APPEARED ON THE DS. THIS IS THE FIRST, DAWN OF SORROW.

Battles of Prince of Persia
Advance Wars Dual Strike
Advance Wars Days of Ruin
Final Fantasy Tactics
Mario & Luigi
Pokémon Conquest
Rocket Slime
Fire Emblem
Front Mission

I ENJOY A GOOD STRATEGY GAME AND THE OCCASIONAL RPG AND THE DS EXCELS AT BOTH.

BREAKTHROUGH PUZZLES!
PICROSS 3D
METEOS
PICROSS DS
MAGNETICA
TETRIS DS

THE DS IS A FANTASTIC SYSTEM IF YOU LIKE PUZZLE GAMES. HERE'S A SELECTION OF MY PERSONAL FAVOURITES.



[DS] NEW SUPER MARIO BROS IS ANOTHER GAME THAT DOES LITTLE WITH ITS SECOND SCREEN, SO WE'RE NOT SHOWING IT.

WHAT HANDHELD DO YOU LIKE TO COLLECT GAMES FOR?

Readers reveal their personal favourites

Geoff Simmons
I have got everything so far for the Evercade handheld. What a cracking retro gaming experience covering different systems. I hope they add more games packages.

Richard Brady
Definitely the Game Gear. Most titles are reasonably priced, and the box art is usually interesting. Helpfully the little plastic boxes have kept the carts in good health after all this time, too!

Matthew Edwards
Neo Geo Pocket Color. I love the clam-shell cases that we got in Europe, like mini versions of the AES cases.

Mark Boreham
I would say the original Nintendo DS, as games are still available in charity shops and trading shops for decent prices.

Dan Clews
I'm finding that the PSP is my favourite handheld to collect for. I find its library really varied in terms of Eastern and Western gaming influences. Add in the UMDs and it makes it a pretty perfect handheld.

Ben Magnet
The GBA. The games on that system were amazing and there was such variety. RPGs, platformers, action games, plus the carts are small so they don't take up a lot of space.

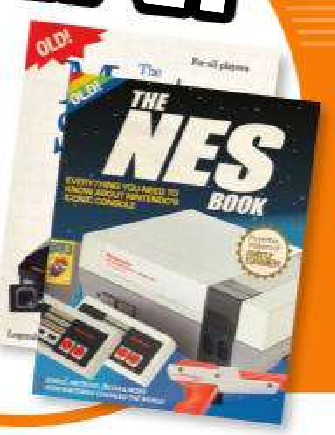
Gamey_Jamie
Just started collecting for the DS. I got a DS Lite because of its backwards compatibility.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of either our NES/Master System or SNES/Mega Drive books



STAR LETTER

LIFE'S A GLITCH

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
Having being a gamer since the days of the Atari 2600 it's fair to say that over time I have encountered my fair share of gaming glitches, the barrage that met me in *Super Mario Bros* undoubtedly being one of the most memorable.

I am writing to ask whether you would consider running a feature on the exploration of such oversights. Whilst still unwarranted, it seemed glitches that occurred in the earlier days of console gaming were acknowledged but readily pardoned and now are recalled with considerable affection.

In the present day, however, such incidents are more prevalent than ever, presumably owing to more complex game programming, as the demand for more grandiose features and accentuated graphics grows, also combined with ambitious deadlines. The recently released *Cyberpunk 2077*, a game so botched it was deemed 'unplayable' being a primary example of this.

The simplicity of those retro games meant that any gaming malfunctions were not quite that severe, instead they were looked upon with fondness, considered fun, amusing, bizarre and at their worst downright frustrating. It would be great to be reunited via your pages with the gaming glitches that lost me many hours of my childhood.

Helen Lang

Thanks for writing in, Helen. You're actually in luck, because this is just the type of article that Nick loves to sink his teeth into. Let him do some digging around and we'll hopefully get something on this subject in a later issue. Have a bookazine from us for coming up with such a brilliant suggestion.

» [PC] Modern games like *Skyrim* are well-known for glitches, so expect it to appear when we get Helen's feature idea off the ground.

HOMINID1
25390
HOMINID2
51600

» [Xbox] If it wasn't for Flash we wouldn't have releases like *Alien Hominid*.

OVER IN A FLASH

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
Since the end of Flash Player is quickly approaching, I was thinking you guys could do an article about it. I feel it technically counts as retro because ActionScript released in 1998.

Luca Lagonia

Another good feature idea, Luca, and another article that Nick is certainly up for writing.

FINDERS KEEPERS

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
I'm a big fan of your magazine and have been buying it for quite a while now. I am particularly keen on the in-depth game features you do, with the stories of their development often making for fascinating reading.

Quite often I can be reminded of a classic game and would like to read a feature on it, so I start rifling through my back issues to see if you covered it. To make this easier, I was wondering if **Retro Gamer** would consider doing an online index of featured games that point to the relevant magazine issue? I'm sure many would find it incredibly useful, it might even make people eager to get hold of a certain back issue!

Paul Speed

» In addition to a list of every **Retro Gamer** feature, you'll also find games and books at the Parks Production website.

Thanks for writing in, Paul. While we don't have anything official Park Productions has a great list. You can visit it at bit.ly/3jOKYvF.

COMPILATION KINGS

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I don't know about you, but I love a good compilation. I love having the ability to dive into a company's back catalogue and play all my favourites from back in the day. I equally enjoy finding new stuff I've never played before as well, and it's often far cheaper than trying to buy the original games. Do the **Retro Gamer** team have any personal favourites when it comes to classic retro collections (I mean compilations featuring arcade and console games and not old compilations like *The Magnificent Seven*). If you have any modern recommendations I'd like to hear about them as well.

Andrew Butler

Cheers for writing in, Andrew. When it comes to older compilations Nick is a big fan of *Taito Legends 2*, while Darran likes the portable gaming of *Capcom Classics Collection Remixed*. When it comes to more modern offerings, Darran stands by his 10/10 score for *Rare Replay*, while Nick swears by Digital Eclipse's *SNK 40th Anniversary Collection*.

A NEW NEO SPIN

Hi there,
Thanks for all the great times across the **Retro Gamer** pages!
I would love to see an in-depth look at the Neo Geo CD focusing on something other than the load

1UP
HI
2UP
TRUCK FUEL
ALIEN

» [Xbox One] *Rare Replay* is astonishing and offers five generations of systems across thirty years.

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

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times. Maybe you could focus on the games that outperform their AES counterparts? Some of the sound track differences are fairly major and a huge improvement on Neo Geo CD versus their MVS/AES equivalents. Yes, load times exist, but they offer us an opportunity to admire the manual artwork, take a sip of wine etc. Think about it, as it's a terrific and underrated machine!

Rob Brand

It's been a good month of brainstorming, as Rob has offered another great idea. We have a couple of freelancers with Neo Geo CDs so this is certainly something we could look into. Darran was going to buy a copy of *Neo Drift Out: New Technology*, but the prices are incredibly high now.

LIGHTGUN GAMES

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I just got the latest issue today and read about the new Sega Astro City Mini. It sounds interesting, but while reading I couldn't help feel it's just another official way to play games that many people have already found methods to play, whether officially or not. I love lightgun games, and these are still common in the arcades today. Rather than see another Mini Console, I'd prefer to see an official solution to playing lightgun games at home. Sega has a superb range, *The House Of The Dead* series, *Virtua Cop* series, and the various licensed games like *Alien 3: The Gun* and *Jurassic Park* as mentioned in the article. I think a dedicated system for lightgun games would fill a big hole in the home retro-gaming scene more than another Mini Console, even if that new system supports some Model 1 games, I'm doubtful it's offering much of a different experience at all.

Keep up the great work during these crazy times!

Graham Plowman

Thanks for getting in touch, Graham. We do like your idea of a lightgun that comes with a selection of classic games. We'd imagine it would be a bit trickier to make for modern TVs, but it certainly wouldn't be impossible.

» [Neo Geo CD] Loading times can be an issue, but it shouldn't stop you ignoring classics like *Pulstar*.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Darran's new obsession

Our editor likes to collect things and he's now decided to pick up the Laserdiscs he always wanted to own during the Nineties. Granted, he doesn't actually have anything to play them on yet, but as he's got a massive PVM in his games shed it's bound to only be a matter of time before he buys a player.

» [Wii] It would be tricky getting lightgun games to work on modern TVs but certainly not impossible. The Wii didn't do a bad job.

Your say

Every month, **Retro Gamer** asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…
What game, system or event defined the Nineties for you?

Stephen Llewellyn
The Mega Drive. After being brought up on the Atari 800 and then Atari ST, this console brought me Sonic and the simplicity of console gaming, and minimal loading screens!

Travis McDowell
I feel like *Super Mario 64* helped define what would become the standard of analog controller navigation in a 3D space without the use of a keyboard and mouse.

Wayne Peter
Sensible World Of Soccer. It ruined my A-levels but it's still one of the best games of all time.

learnedrobb
Sonic 2sday. Probably the peak for Nineties game launches.

Matthew Huettmann
The original PlayStation. This one system and its releases have changed my life more than any other system so much so that I spent years hunting down another original one that works. Its library of great games was not only memorable, but also shaped me as a person.

Bartek Czartoryski
Probably *Street Fighter II*. For the first time in my life I felt like I could have an arcade under my own roof.

RetroBob
What defines Nineties gaming for me is staring longingly at wall-to-wall games in my local shop and pouring over news, screenshots and reviews in a myriad of magazines.

Andrew Waite
Playing *Doom* on a PC with a 66MHz ST 486DX2 CPU.

Richard Turner
I'd say the whole of Nineties gaming was incredible. Every week there seemed to be an amazing game and technology was always fresh and interesting even if there was a lot of failed consoles. It really was a golden age for gaming that I don't think we will see again.

Psj3809
Madden! I love American football and had to get a Mega Drive when I first saw that game. I loved it, and bought the new version every year.

ausretrogamer
The build up to the release of the PlayStation. Seeing that dinosaur render totally blew our minds! The anticipation was palpable.

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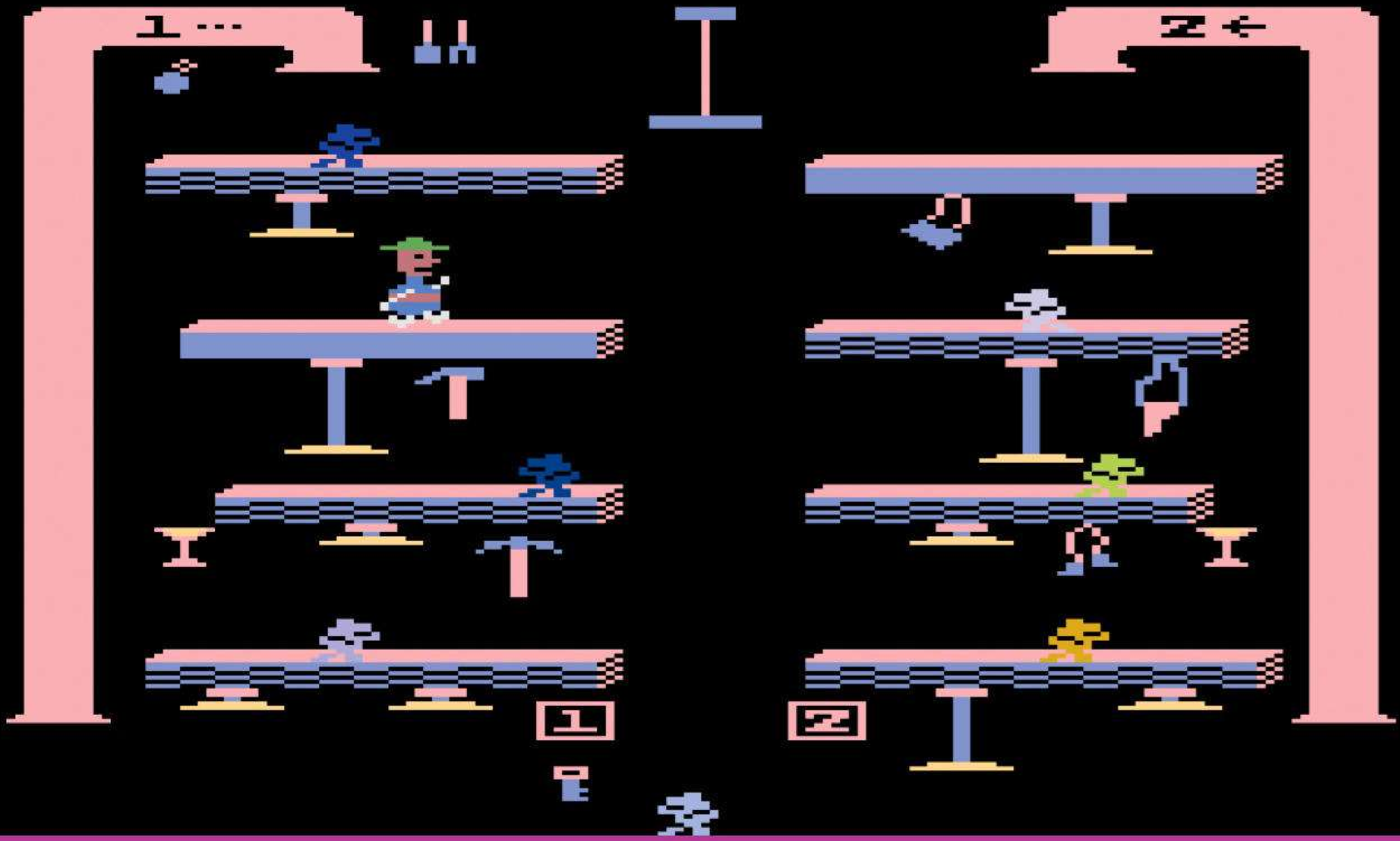

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ENDGAME

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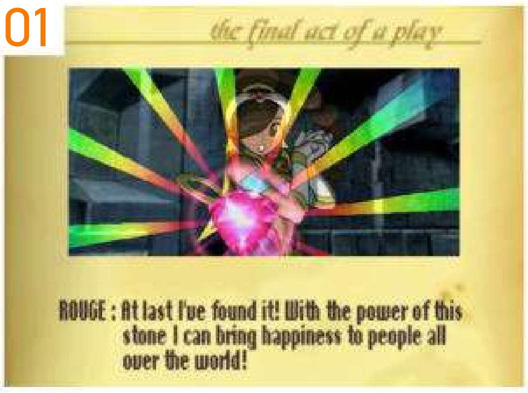
POWER STONE: ROUGE'S ENDING

» We'd love to get our hands on a gem that grants any wish, just to get an affordable reissue of *Panzer Dragoon Saga*. Rouge here though, she's a bit more altruistic – she wants to use this astonishing power to bring happiness to the world, and she's willing to beat up a bunch of other people to do it. So how does she get on? Let's skip to the end and find out…

01

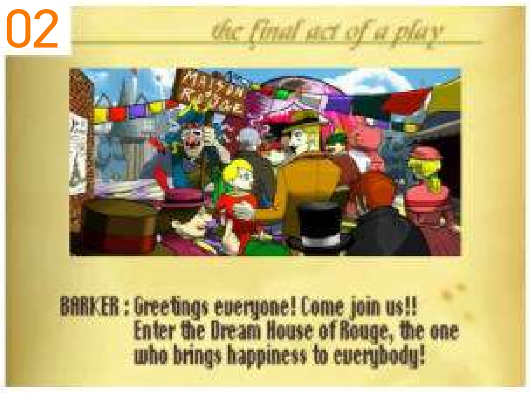


the final act of a play

ROUGE : At last I've found it! With the power of this stone I can bring happiness to people all over the world!

» Success achieved, and Rouge seems to be fully committed to her goal of spreading happiness throughout the population – no last minute changes of heart here, as you find so often when someone gains unlimited power and instantly succumbs to corruption.

02

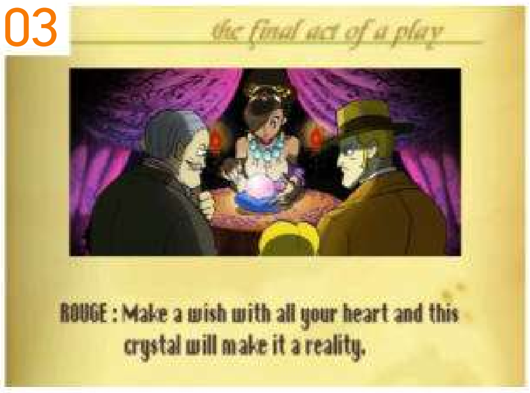


the final act of a play

BARKER : Greetings everyone! Come join us!! Enter the Dream House of Rouge, the one who brings happiness to everybody!

» With the powerful stone in tow, Rouge heads to the World Fair in Paris, where she sets up a wish granting booth. That makes some level of sense, heading to events that will gather enormous crowds in a convenient location.

03

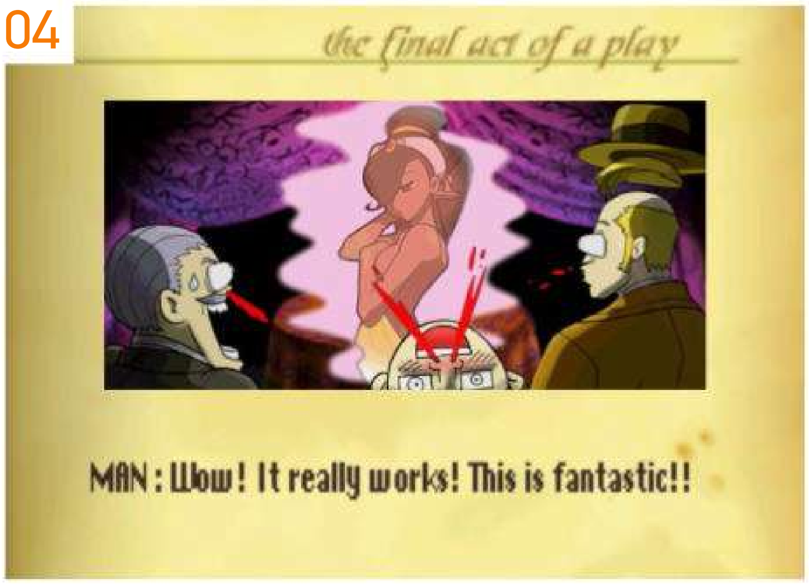


the final act of a play

ROUGE : Make a wish with all your heart and this crystal will make it a reality.

» So these three people, two grown men and a child of indeterminate age, head into the booth for their very own personalised miracle. With seemingly infinite power at their disposal, what wonders will these gentlemen choose to walk away with?

04

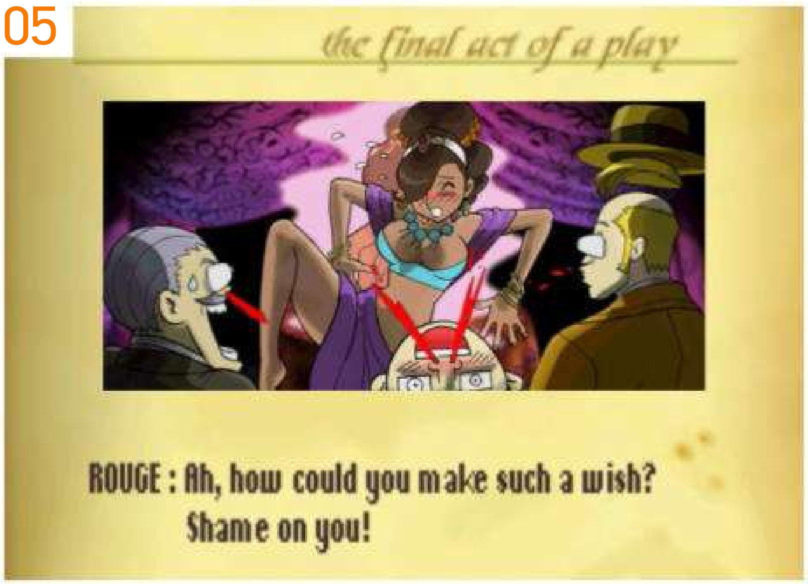


the final act of a play

MAN : Wow! It really works! This is fantastic!!

» Oh, of course. The Power Stone, being a dumb wish fulfilment machine, does as asked and displays Rouge stripping. Is it a damning indictment of men that when given unlimited potential, they cannot fix their minds on any higher purpose than seeing a naked woman? Yes, of course it is.

05



the final act of a play

ROUGE : Ah, how could you make such a wish? Shame on you!

» Rouge, having no apparent power to stop the vision of herself getting undressed, decides to block it with her own body. She went through all of that hardship, and this is what people do with the gift she's given them? Frankly, we think she should have been considerably more selfish.

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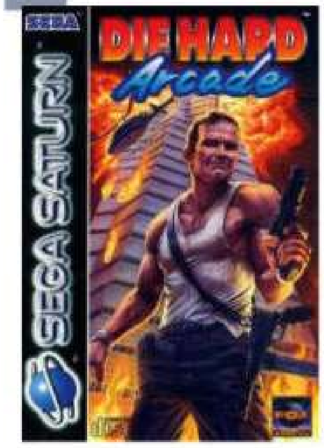

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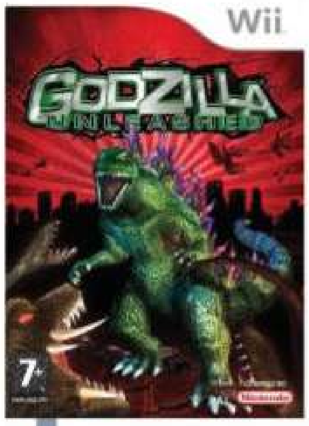

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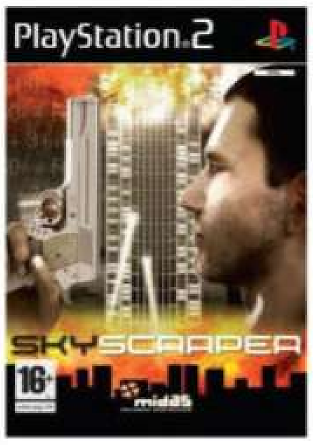

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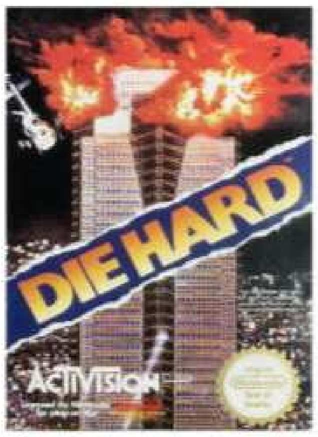

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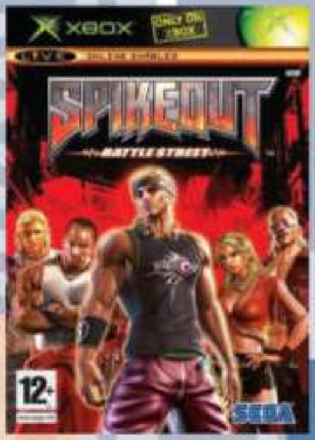

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